



IN
QUEST
OF THE
GOLDEN
CHEST

GEORGE BARTON



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IN QUEST OF THE GOLDEN CHEST

IN QUEST OF THE GOLDEN CHEST

A STORY OF ADVENTURE

BY

GEORGE BARTON

AUTHOR OF "THE MYSTERY OF CLEVERLY," "THE ANGELS
OF THE BATTLEFIELD," ETC.



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IN QUEST OF THE GOLDEN CHEST

CHAPTER I

CAPTAIN HAWKINS RETURNS HOME AFTER A
LONG AND EVENTFUL VOYAGE

AFTER cruising around the world for twenty years, Captain James Hawkins, of the *Water Witch*, was returning home with a fortune.

Two men stood on the porch of the hotel at Lewes, straining their eyes for a sight of the *Water Witch*. One was the landlord of the village inn; the other was a thick-set person in a faded brown coat. He blinked at the landlord, and leaning on the rail of the veranda, gazed out toward the bay. He rubbed his sleepy eyes several times, but all he could see was impenetrable banks of dull, heavy clouds.

"I don't believe he's coming," he growled.

"Your beliefs don't amount to much, Rambo," retorted the landlord.

The red face of the thick-set man became purplish with resentment, and he advanced

toward the landlord menacingly. He looked formidable and unlovely. He rubbed the stubby fingers of his right hand across the closely cropped hair on the top of his round head, and peered out of a pair of dull gray eyes—eyes more like those of a rat than of a man, so small and deep set were they. If he thought of fighting, however, he changed his mind quickly and, going to the end of the porch, sat down in sullen silence.

The fog was clearing slowly but surely. The vapor dissipated and curled into thousands of little balls, and then wound skyward like a misty white curtain being ceremoniously unrolled. The bay gradually cleared and in ten minutes the sea was calm and unflecked. The lighthouses at Cape May and Cape Henlopen stood out sharp and clear, silent white sentinels guarding the welfare of the travelers of the deep. The first strange object that met the searching gaze of the men on the porch was a trim-looking steamer, painted entirely white, its smokestack standing out in bold relief against the greenish waste of waters.

The landlord uttered an exclamation of surprise. He turned to his wife, who was standing in the doorway.

“Bring my binoculars,” he commanded.

Before she had time to hand them to him, he snatched them from her and peered eagerly

through the strong lenses. Presently he laid them down with a look of gratification.

"I knew I couldn't be mistaken."

"What is it?"

"It's the *Water Witch*."

"What! Jim Hawkins' ship?"

"The same, as I'm a blue hen's chicken!"

Rambo picked up the discarded glasses and gazed long and earnestly at the white object.

"You're right," he said. "It is the *Water Witch*."

"Of course it is," said the landlord, self-satisfaction depicted on his sunburned face; "didn't I say it was?"

"Yes," assented the other with unusual amiability, "but how in the world did he come to be in port this morning?"

"Why," retorted the other dogmatically, "he's come home; that's the reason. We all come home sometime, don't we?"

"Yes, I 'spose so," answered Rambo with the air of a man who is making a reluctant admission, "but I've been hearing stories of his being lost at sea."

"Rubbish!" quoth the other, his confidence greatly strengthened by the ocular demonstration of the white ship. "What he's been doing is making a fortune."

The beady eyes in Bill Rambo's face danced with interest. His voice was lowered to a re-

spectful key. He spoke with as much deference as was possible for a man with a throaty voice.

"Do you know for certain?"

"Sure; Mrs. Hawkins's been telling my wife all about the letters she got from the Captain. Why, everything that Jim Hawkins touched turned to gold."

The little eyes were actually glistening now. The big man was breathing heavily. He was like a child who has had his first taste of fairy tales. He was hungry for more.

"Where's he been?"

"Everywhere!" exclaimed the landlord with a wide sweeping gesture of his two hands.

"Where in particular?" asked the persistent one.

"In South American waters in particular," replied the other, his own importance growing with every word he uttered. "Why, he's been around the Horn a couple of times, he has. He's been going to and fro with cargoes of logwood and such like. It wouldn't surprise me if he came home to retire and live on his money."

The landlord might have continued in this vein indefinitely if his attention had not been attracted to a movement out on the water. He shaded his eyes with his hands and after a moment's pause, exclaimed:

"They're lowering a boat from the *Water Witch*."

Rambo looked and saw that a rowboat was already in the water. Four seamen climbed over the side of the big steamer and seated themselves in the smaller craft. In a few moments a tall, angular man followed and quartered himself in the stern of the boat.

"That's Jim Hawkins!" exclaimed the red-faced one. "I'd know him a mile away."

Before the rowboat started for the shore a traveling bag was lowered and laid at the Captain's feet, and the seamen fell to and pulled lustily toward the landing. A number of persons had gathered on the porch and they watched the arrival of the newcomers with great curiosity. As each dip of the oars brought the seamen nearer their destination, the interest of the natives grew in intensity. Presently the bow of the boat grazed the sandy beach and the tall man leaped out, carrying his bag in his right hand. Many of the spectators rushed forward to greet him. Some addressed him as "Jim," others called him "Captain," while a few hung timidly in the background. One of these was Rambo, although it can hardly be said that timidity was one of his attributes.

"Why don't you go and shake hands with the Captain?" asked the landlord,

"Not much," was the sullen answer. "Jim Hawkins don't like a bone in my body and I'm not going to run the risk of being insulted."

"Being kicked, I guess you mean," chuckled the other.

Captain Hawkins was striding up the hill by this time, making rapidly for the road which led to his picturesque little home. Half way up he halted abruptly and turned to one of the men who was following him.

"Where's Paul?"

"Paul, what Paul?"

"Paul Parker, my nephew," was the irritable response. "Doesn't he know the *Water Witch* is in port?"

"I guess he doesn't," replied the other; "you see the fog's been so thick here you could cut it with a knife. No one knew you were in port until the mist lifted a few minutes ago."

"Umph!" was the short and enigmatic response.

The Captain continued his journey, scarcely looking at his curious neighbors who formed an unsolicited guard of honor about him. Although he moved rapidly, there was a languor about the man. His face was burnt a dark brown, but the color was not the color of health.

As he reached the two-story frame cottage

which he called home, the door was thrown open and a little woman rushed out, crying:

“Jim! Jim!”

The next moment he had her in his strong embrace. There was a tremor in his voice as he said:

“I’m home safe, Mother; there’s no need to go on so.”

But the tears gushed forth from the woman unrestrained. She put her head on his brawny shoulders and gave full vent to her feelings. One or two women among the crowd of idlers which had gathered, lifted the corners of their aprons and brushed away the furtive moisture from their own eyes. Captain Hawkins, happening to look around, caught the battery of curious glances. He waved his hand in a half-jocular way.

“You’ll have to excuse us, folks; Mother and I have a lot to talk about.”

And the next moment they had retired within the house and closed the door after them. But the return of the Captain was an event of momentous importance in the little town, and a group of neighbors still lingered about the doorway and talked and gossiped and speculated to their heart’s content.

In the meantime a sturdy-looking boy of sixteen in a red sweater stood on the beach and gazed at the *Water Witch*. He had black

curly hair and wore the wholesome look of one who is much in the open air. Although young, he had the ways and manners of one who has matured thoughts and habits. He thrust his hands in his pockets, and screwing up his eyes, tried to decipher the name on the bow of the boat.

"Does it look familiar, Paul?"

The boy turned around and found the landlord smiling down at him from the porch of the hotel.

"Yes," he answered. "It looks like a name I've often heard Aunt Susan mention. I'm trying to make it out."

"Well, it's the *Water Witch* all right," replied the other, with the conscious air of a man who has important news to impart.

Paul Parker rushed up the porch two steps at a time.

"When did she come in?" he asked breathlessly.

"This morning."

"Has uncle come ashore?"

"Yes, and you're the first one he asked for; he's up at the house now."

Paul waited for no more. He dashed up the hill at breakneck speed and reaching the roadway, hurried toward the frame cottage. The crowd of gossipers had dispersed, but a bulky figure was in front of the house trying

to peep into the window. This prying individual had one foot on the edge of the porch and the other on the top step of the cottage. He was striving to squint into the room by looking over the white curtain that covered the lower half of the window. One glance at that round head and the short sprawling legs revealed the identity of the eavesdropper. It was Bill Rambo. There was a big stick lying in the roadway. Paul Parker's first impulse was to pick this up and give the peeper a good whack on the back. But he noticed that the front door was slightly ajar, and that Bill Rambo was holding himself in position by clutching the inner jamb of the door. Paul's decision was made instantly. He ran up the steps lightly and tiptoed silently into the hallway. The sun reflected his figure, and Bill Rambo turning his head, saw and recognized the boy. But it was too late for his own good. Paul closed the door with a bang and caught the big fellow's fingers in the jamb of the framework. They were released almost instantly, and then Paul re-closed and locked the door. From his place of safety within, he heard a mighty howl of rage and pain that resounded to the water's edge and echoed back again, and looking out a side window he beheld Bill Rambo shambling down the hill, nursing his injured fingers and swearing like a pirate.

CHAPTER II

CAPTAIN HAWKINS UNEXPECTEDLY EMBARKS ON A LONGER AND MORE UNCERTAIN VOYAGE

ON the morning after his return home, Captain Hawkins complained of severe pains about the chest, and at the urgent request of his wife, went to bed and was covered with warm blankets. For two days he was subjected to a course of old-fashioned home treatment, but on the evening of the second day his condition became so alarming that it was necessary to send for a physician. The doctor made a very careful examination and wrote out a prescription. The blunt sailor came straight to the point.

“What’s the matter with me, Doctor?”

The doctor smiled.

“If I gave you the technical name for your ailment, you would probably not understand it; however, it concerns your heart, which is seriously affected.”

“Does that mean that I am going to die?”

“Not necessarily.”

“Not necessarily,” repeated the Captain, “but probably—is that what you mean?”

The doctor was silent.

"Come," said the seaman impatiently, "I want the truth."

"Probably, is what I mean," was the reluctant assent.

After the departure of the doctor the old salt acted with characteristic promptness. He sent for his wife. He spoke calmly and with precision.

"Susan, I'm about to go on my last voyage; it's unexpected, but the call has come, and I've always been a man to obey orders. Thank God, I've been given time to set my house in order before I start on the uncertain journey. I've made a will leaving everything to you with the understanding that you will take care of Paul Parker. He's your nephew as well as mine, and I'm sure you'll love the boy as I do."

There was a painful silence for some moments.

"Is that all?" finally asked the weeping wife.

"No," came the sharp response, "there's one other thing. It's the most important of all. That's why I've left it to the last."

"What is it?"

The dying sailor looked at her steadily for a moment. He spoke in a solemn manner, with an added dignity and impressiveness.

"Send for the boy. He must hear this. I've got an important task for him."

Paul Parker was summoned to the sick room. The tears came into his eyes when he beheld his uncle stretched out on the bed—the big man, so stalwart and yet so helpless. The boy wore his red sweater and he twirled his cap nervously in his hands. He had a great affection for this kinsman whom he now saw for the first time, yet felt a certain awe in his presence.

"Come here, Paul," said the Captain.

He advanced and took the rough, sunburned hand that was extended from beneath the snow-white counterpane. The sailor looked at the boy for a long time.

"You're a fine-looking lad," he said finally. "Sit down on that stool and listen carefully to all I have to say."

Paul obeyed.

"All my life," began the prostrate man, "I've tried to accumulate enough wealth to leave you and mother comfortable. I did so, but now that the hour has struck, here I am dying and the fortune is thousands of miles away."

"Jim, Jim, you're wandering," protested his wife, who stood on the other side of the bed.

The sailor waved his hand in a commanding way.

"I'm the Captain and I'm sailing according to the chart. Don't interrupt us, Mother. I'm going to give the boy the gospel truth—the only thing a seaman should speak when he's nearing the shores of another world."

She caught her breath and nodded to indicate that there would be no further interruption. The Captain lay very quiet for a few minutes.

"Go on, Uncle," prompted Paul; "I'm listening."

"When I chartered the *Water Witch* three years ago, I made up my mind to make some money and I succeeded. I found the South American trade profitable. I've hauled walnut and logwood and—well, probably what you would call the munitions of war. I've carried guns and powder for revolutionists, and as a result of all that, I had a profit of fifty thousand dollars in gold certificates. I packed 'em in an old cedar chest, and with 'em a set of silverware and some fine silk dresses for Mother.

"If I'd taken that and sailed straight home six months ago, all would have been well, but I didn't and the consequence is that I have to put a man's load on a boy's shoulders. While I was in Jamaica, I got an offer to carry some stuff to the Argentine Republic and I accepted. The question was what to do with the

treasure chest. I was afraid to take it to sea on a dangerous trip, for you know ships have gone to the bottom of the ocean, and I couldn't bear to think of all the valuable contents of my strong box gone to make sport for the fishes. The chest was locked good and strong, the same as a regular trunk, and I finally decided to leave it with an express company at Spanish-town. I'm a little too old-fashioned about things of this kind. My father before me used to keep his money in a tea canister, and I myself—I was always a little bit superstitious about banks. You know, they bust sometimes, and that would be worse than having the money go to the bottom of Davy Jones' Locker; so I finally deposited the chest with the express company."

"And is it there now?" asked Paul with wide-open eyes.

"You bet it is—or at least it should be," said the sick man.

"Have you anything to show for it?" interrupted Mrs. Hawkins.

"Of course."

"What is it?" queried Paul.

The sick man motioned his listeners to lift him up from the pillow. They did so after a great effort. He sat upright, breathing heavily. His next act was to strip off his outer

shirt. There hanging around his neck was a bit of tarred string and suspended to it and resting on his red underwear was a tiny chamois bag.

"Take it off," he gasped.

Paul did so with much difficulty.

"Open it."

The bag was opened and the boy pulled forth a big brass check.

"That entitles the bearer to the cedar chest," whispered the sick man, smiling at his own ingenuity.

Paul looked at the round object long and curiously.

"Put this in the bag," ordered the Captain, his voice becoming husky.

He handed Paul a brass key, the size ordinarily used in the door of a dwelling.

"That will open the chest," he said, smiling at the woman and the boy.

The solemnity of the scene made them speechless. The dying man was easily the most self-possessed of the three. He signaled to Paul.

"Take off your sweater."

The boy did so with trembling hands.

"Now kneel down."

Paul obeyed.

Again the sick man raised himself up in the

bed. He took the string with the little bag and passing it over the boy's head hung it about his neck.

"Never take that off until you get the chest."

Paul nodded a silent promise.

"How is he to go after it?" ventured the woman.

"I was waiting for that," said the sailor, with a self-satisfied look, "and I'll soon give you the answer. Paul, you're to be the master of the *Water Witch*."

The boy stared so hard that his two eyes threatened to come out of his head.

"Yes," nodded the sick man, "I mean just what I say; nothing more nor less. I chartered the *Water Witch* for three years. It's now March; the time won't be up until July. She's provisioned and the crew have all been paid in advance. I want you to take her to Spanishtown and get that chest and sail back with it to your aunt, and she'll deal with you in a way that will satisfy you, won't you, Mother?"

The tears glistened in the woman's eyes. She bowed her head and said brokenly:

"Paul and I will never quarrel. We are too well acquainted for that."

In the midst of his grief the boy tried to consider his romantic mission in a business

light. He thought for a few moments and when he spoke it was to say:

"None of the men on the *Water Witch* knows me."

"I guess Job Singleton knows you," murmured the Captain. "He's the first mate, and when you explain the situation to him, he'll help you. He'd do anything for Jim Hawkins."

"Will I tell him about the chest?"

"No! no!" cried the man excitedly, "you must keep that a secret from every one. That's why I'm sending you on the mission. Only reveal it in case it's absolutely necessary to save the chest."

"I think, Uncle," said the boy, "you'd better give me a line to some one on the *Water Witch*."

The Captain nodded his assent. A table was quickly drawn to the bedside; pen, paper and ink were procured, and after much shifting and heavy breathing, the sick man managed to scrawl the following:

"To whom it may concern:

*"I authorize the bearer to take command of the *Water Witch*.*

"JAMES HAWKINS."

Paul blotted the note, and folding it carefully, placed it in his pocket. There was a

silence lasting for some moments. Mrs. Hawkins was the first to break it. She turned to Paul anxiously:

“Do you think you can locate this Spanish-town?”

“He can’t miss it,” spoke the sailor with a grim smile. “It’s only about ten miles from Kingston. As soon as you get into the harbor, boy, look toward the shore; you’ll see a long white-washed building with a cupola and a clock tower. That’s the market house. Directly alongside of it is the express company’s office where the cedar chest is deposited.”

An unspoken query came to the tip of Paul’s tongue. The solemnity of the scene could not repress it. He blurted out:

“Wasn’t it a mighty risky thing to leave a chest of gold in such a place?”

A look of deep cunning overspread the man’s face. He chuckled softly to himself.

“That’s the clever part of it. No one will ever suspect that travel-stained box. The man I gave it to believes the chest is filled with old clothes. Everybody else will think the same.”

Neither the boy nor the woman felt convinced, but they made no attempt to argue the question. Indeed, they pretended to agree with the wisdom of what he had done. He turned to Paul eagerly:

"Now you understand it all?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have the check and the key of the chest and the order to Job Singleton?"

"I have all of those things."

"Very well," and the patient sank back on his pillow with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Who are the owners of the *Water Witch*?" asked Paul as an afterthought.

"Hazleberry & Company of New York," answered the Captain. "You'll find all of that in the ship's papers. If all goes well you can turn the steamer over to them in July when my lease expires. If she should sink," and the speaker gave an uncanny laugh that made the boy shiver, "it don't make any difference to them, for they'll get the insurance."

Mrs. Hawkins was fearful of the effort of the prolonged conversation on the sick man.

"I think we'd better let the Captain rest," she suggested to Paul.

The Captain overheard the remark.

"All right," he said, "you may go for awhile, but remember all I've told you, boy, and don't fail to start off to-morrow morning."

"But," expostulated Paul, "to leave you when you are so ill, I—"

The Captain pounded his fist against the

headboard. He was accustomed to obedience. He repeated his order in a loud voice.

"To-morrow morning—go, whether I'm alive or dead."

Paul bowed his head.

"Promise me," insisted the sick man in a querulous voice.

"I promise."

A satisfied expression flitted across the face of the stricken one.

"Leave me now; I think I hear the doctor's step on the stairway."

They left the room together but found no one on the outside. There had been footsteps on the stairway, but they were not the doctor's. Indeed, while the dying man told his story to the woman and the boy, and when he handed the key of the chest to Paul Parker, a head had been thrust into the partially opened doorway. A pair of eager eyes had drunk in every word of the strange story, and a pair of glittering, beady eyes had watched every action that had taken place in the sick-room.

The eager ears and beady eyes belonged to Bill Rambo.

An hour later Paul hurriedly summoned the priest, and the dying sailor was given the consolations and the last rites of the Church of which he had always been a loyal member.

CHAPTER III

PAUL BOARDS THE "WATER WITCH" AND FINDS HIMSELF IN A CURIOUS PREDICAMENT

BEFORE the sun went down the following day, Captain Hawkins had gone on that last journey which each member of the human family must take. Reluctantly, Paul Parker left the sorrowing widow and securing a small boat, rowed out to the *Water Witch*. It was almost dark when he reached the steamer. He found a seaman on guard and revealed his identity to the man.

"I'd like to speak to Job Singleton, the first mate," he said.

"Sorry," said the sailor, "but the mate's gone ashore. As soon as he heard of the death of Captain Hawkins, he left the ship, but said he'd be back as soon as possible."

"You know," said Paul, "I'm the nephew of Captain Hawkins."

The man bowed awkwardly and saluted with his left hand.

"A very good Captain he was. We'll all be mighty lucky if we get another like him."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," said the boy with a grateful look on his bright young face. "We loved him and it's a satisfaction to know that he was liked by the men."

There was a silence for some minutes. Presently the seaman asked in a respectful way:

"I understood, Mr. Parker, that we were to sail from here at once. Will the death of the Captain change our plans?"

It was the first time Paul had ever been addressed as a man, and it made him feel a bit foolish, but he recovered quickly and replied:

"No, it will make no difference. It was Captain Hawkins' last wish that the *Water Witch* should start on its journey to-day. That's why I wished to see Mr. Singleton."

"Well, he should be back within an hour."

"Can we get away to-night?" asked Paul.

"I'm afraid not."

"Why?"

"Well, there's a hurricane coming up now, and the boat's in a safe harbor. It would be a foolish risk to expose her for the sake of a few hours. This will blow over during the night and we can start off bright and early in the morning."

"But," said Paul, fretfully, "Captain Hawkins said we were to sail to-day without fail."

The man looked steadily at Paul for a few moments. He carefully removed his cud of tobacco and tossed it overboard; he put his hands on his hips and speaking very deliberately, said:

"I'm a pretty good sailor, ain't I?"

"I suppose so," was the dubious reply.

"And you're not much of a sailor?"

"I suppose not," was the more cheerful response.

"Well, what's the result; simply that I know what I'm talking about and you don't."

"But," said Paul, "my only concern is to carry out my uncle's wishes. He said to go to-day."

"My boy," said the sailor, "if Captain Hawkins was alive and on this ship—and Lord knows I wish he was—and knew about the hurricane, you couldn't induce him to leave the harbor to-night—no, not if you tried to persuade him with a club."

"Do you believe that?"

"As I believe I'm a sailor."

"All right," said Paul resignedly, "I'll believe it too, and wait 'till morning."

"You know," added the sailor, "Job Singleton will be about later, and if there's a ghost of a show of pulling out to-night, he'll do it."

"That's true," agreed the boy; "I'm perfectly satisfied."

"Are you going with us?" asked the man curiously.

"Oh, yes," said Paul, drawing himself up proudly, "you know I'm to sort of have charge."

He did not say he was to have supreme command. That would sound too much like boasting. It would be time enough to speak of his full authority when he came to talk it over with the first mate.

"Perhaps you'd like to go to the cabin?"

"Why, yes, if you don't mind, I'll go below for awhile."

The man escorted him downstairs into a roomy apartment fitted up with maps and charts. Adjoining this was a smaller room tastefully furnished.

"This was Captain Hawkins' stateroom," said the sailor, "and I 'spose that you'll occupy it during the trip."

"Why, yes," said Paul, "if the arrangement is agreeable to Mr. Singleton."

He walked into the small cabin and while he was looking about, the sailor very obligingly carried down his gripsack and some clothing he had brought aboard with him. After that he was left alone. He made a quick inventory of the little apartment that was to be his future home. On the side of the room was a long narrow bunk covered with spotless

linen. It was not as generous in its proportions as the bed to which he was accustomed at home, but it looked inviting and comfortable.

Adjoining the bunk was a miniature roll-top desk. It was open and the stationery lay exposed just as Captain Hawkins had left it only a few days before. Three books were stuffed into the pigeon-holes of the desk. One was the log-book of the *Water Witch*. Paul opened it carelessly, and there before him were the entries as they were made day by day in his uncle's big sprawling hand. The sight evoked tender memories and the tears dropped from his eyes and blurred the open pages. The second book was a copy of the navigation laws of the United States, while the third was a thumb-marked copy of the "The Faith of Our Fathers," which Captain Hawkins, with his simple, manly nature, had read over and over again, each time with increasing reverence and interest.

As Paul looked about him he became more accustomed to his surroundings. On the wall was a wooden model of an Atlantic liner, standing out in all of its simplicity and strength. The boy glanced at the desk again and for the first time noticed a clover-shaped frame containing three photographs. One was a picture of his uncle in full uniform.

Opposite it was a speaking likeness of his Aunt Susan, while in the center was the photograph of an eager, bright-looking child with black curly hair. He looked a second time; there could be no doubt about it—it was a picture of himself evidently mailed to Captain Hawkins by his Aunt Susan.

At this reminder of his uncle's love, he could restrain his feelings no longer. He dropped into the chair and resting his head on the open desk, sobbed with all the emotion of his young and affectionate nature. Presently, he recovered his self-possession. He felt half-ashamed of the momentary weakness, but experienced also a sense of refreshment from having relieved his overwrought feelings. He had been under a severe strain from the time his uncle reached home until his death. For two nights he had been deprived of his natural rest and there was little wonder that he should find himself exhausted.

More than an hour had gone by since he boarded the boat, and still Job Singleton had not returned. Aimlessly the boy picked up the book on the laws of navigation and began perusing its pages. It was almost dusk, but still bright enough to read without the aid of artificial light.

Paul was deeply interested in the science of navigation. Indeed, he had already taken a

course of study in that branch of seamanship,—a course supplemented by actual practice on the small boats plying about his home. He felt now that the time was close at hand when he would be called upon to put his knowledge into execution. Consequently he was deeply interested in the volume. He continued to read until the darkness made further effort impossible. His first thought was to turn on the electric light in the cabin, but when he pressed the button, he found that it would not respond. He was about to hunt up the engineer and ascertain the difficulty, but on second thought, he changed his mind. He laid down his book and was soon in a deep reverie, picturing the events that had occurred during the few days just passed, and speculating upon the adventures that lay before him on the journey that was to begin in the morning.

Presently he grew drowsy. The bunk with the clean linen looked very inviting; the mate's invitation was heeded. He closed the door of the inner cabin. He hung his coat on a peg near the door, first ascertaining that his letter of authority addressed to Job Singleton was in the manila envelope in which it had been placed for safe keeping. He pulled off his boots and without undressing, threw himself upon the springy mattress. Youth is elastic and responsive, Nature asserted itself; in a

few minutes he was sound asleep. For hours he slept on, obtaining the invigorating repose which comes to a young body and mind free from the ills which often torture Nature in later life. It was morning when his exhaustion had spent itself, and then he was drowsy and only half awake. He imagined himself in his comfortable bed at home. He turned over on his other side and dreamt of sunny skies and a serene sea.

A little later he was aroused by the persistent blowing of a fog horn. He opened his eyes; his senses returned gradually. He remembered he was sleeping in the cabin of the *Water Witch*. He wondered vaguely whether Job Singleton had returned. He reached over to turn on the electric light but remembered that the switch was not working. After that he lay still for a long while. Ten or fifteen minutes later he pulled out his watch to discover the time. It was ticking merrily away, but unfortunately the room was so dark that he could not see the face of the faithful little instrument. He listened quietly, and above the ticking of the watch came the roaring of the wind. It was the hurricane, filling the air with a fury of sound, and rocking the boat as if it were a cradle adrift on the waters.

He jumped out of his berth and groping under the bunk, found his boots and pulled

them on. In another moment he had discovered his coat. At that stage of the proceedings his eager ear caught a new sound. The meaning of it dawned on him by degrees. The regular rhythmic grinding, thumping noise never ceased.

The boat was in motion.

He hurried to the door but it would not open. He felt for the key but it was no longer in the lock. He grasped the knob of the door and pulled with all of his strength, but there was no response. After that he sat on the edge of the bunk and thought it over very carefully. While he sat there a sudden lurch of the boat threw him from his perch and he was thrown to the floor and bumped his head against the side of the cabin. It made a nasty bruise and it caused him pain, but he gave no heed to that. Recovering his feet he reached for the handle of the door again, but the effort was fruitless. The barrier was immovable. In a sudden outburst of wrath he beat on the panels of the wood with all his strength. He kept this up until his knuckles began to bleed, but the roaring of the wind on the outside drowned out the sound made by his puny fists—so much more powerful is Nature than man.

He had strong lungs, and when the beating on the door proved ineffectual, he began to

shout at the top of his voice. He kept this up for several minutes until the shout degenerated into a shriek, but the answering winds seemed to mock his boyish efforts. Presently he dropped on the floor exhausted by his efforts. As he sat there, he vaguely remembered that when he had gone to sleep, the key was on the inside of the cabin. It was not there now. The conviction slowly forced itself upon his dazed mind. This thing was not an accident; it was intentional.

He was a prisoner in the cabin of the *Water Witch*.

CHAPTER IV

PAUL MEETS A NEW FRIEND AND DISCOVERS AN OLD ENEMY

FOR a long while Paul lay on the floor of the cabin considering his peculiar situation. He knew that it would be folly to continue his outcries while the hurricane lasted. Presently fatigue overcame him and he went to sleep for the second time. How long he slept he did not know, but when he awoke, the wind had abated and the sun was shining through the heavy plate glass window in the porthole. He jumped up and involuntarily tried the door.

It was open.

He looked on the outside; there was no key in the lock. Surprise stupefied the boy. After a time, he walked into the outer cabin and from thence to the deck. The companionway opened on the stern of the boat. No one was in sight, so Paul seated himself on a coil of rope and looked about him in an effort to get his bearings. The sea was as placid as a pond and the *Water Witch* plowed its way

through the waves with the ease and certainty of a great winged bird. It had been bitter cold when he left home, and now the wind, while still brisk, was greatly tempered. Far off in the distance he could see a band of green skirting the water's edge. He felt, vaguely, that the steamer must be passing South Carolina and getting into Southern waters. While he was gazing at the sea, his reverie was interrupted by the sound of tuneful whistling. A chubby-faced man with merry eyes and a whimsical mouth came hustling toward him. The chubby-faced man wore a white cap and an apron and was carrying a bag of flour. Paul arose. He felt it was time for him to be up and doing. He saluted.

"I'm Paul Parker!"

The little man waved his hand with a flourish.

"And I'm Mike Moran!"

"I'm the nephew of Captain Hawkins," added Paul, fearful of losing his dignity in an encounter with this elfish-looking person.

"And I'm the cook of the *Water Witch*," said the merry one, flourishing his unoccupied hand in grotesque fashion.

Paul did not smile at this sally, and the comical fellow assumed a sober expression.

"I beg pardon," he said, "no harm meant; what can I do for you?"

"I'd like to see Job Singleton—the mate of this boat."

"I'll have him here in two shakes of a lamb's tail," quoth the cook.

A few minutes later, a tall man with a slight stoop ambled toward the stern of the boat. He poked out a great big weather-beaten hand.

"Put it there, youngster."

Paul took the outstretched hand.

"It's young Paul Parker, as I'm a Yankee. Why, boy, when the Captain first showed me your picture, you were only a little bit of a tot."

Paul's face brightened. Here was a friend—and the very one he was most anxious to see.

"Uncle often wrote about you, Mr. Singleton."

"Aye, aye," cried the mate, "and a whiter man never sailed the seas than Jim Hawkins. I'm sorry he's dead and more sorry that I couldn't stay for the funeral."

"Did you see Aunt Susan?" asked Paul, curiously.

"No, I didn't. She was that broke up with grief that they wouldn't let no one see her. She said Jim was gone and Paul was gone and she was left all alone. When my name was given to her, she sent word downstairs that I was to sail away with the *Water Witch* at once, and when I asked for something more

definite, she said that if I loved the memory of her husband, I was to go at once without asking any more questions. It was a bit peculiar at first, but it's all right now—all smooth sailing.”

Paul wondered how the mate could have learned all about the trip so quickly.

“You’re to sail for Spanishtown,” he said.

“Oh, I know all about that,” smiled the other, taking the pipe from his mouth and knocking out the ashes against the rail of the boat.

“You’re to land me there,” persisted Paul.

“Why, certainly, son, if you want to get off there,” assented the mate with a good-natured smile.

“Of course I want to get off there; that’s why I’m here.”

“Oh, very well,” was the cheery response, “I don’t s’pose the new Captain will have any objections.”

“I should say not,” said Paul sagely, “inasmuch as I happen to be the new Captain.”

At this retort, the mate slapped his brawny palm against his knee and laughed in such a loud and jolly way that Paul unconsciously found himself joining in the merriment.

Job Singleton was a wholesome-looking man; if he had straightened up he would certainly have measured over six feet two. He had a pair of mild blue eyes, singularly boyish-

looking for a man who has passed his fiftieth year. He had a great mane of bushy brown hair, liberally streaked with silver threads. The smooth upper lip, the bushy whiskers, the high forehead, and the quiet, self-contained manners made him seem like a superior person in an inferior position. This tall, big-limbed man, without an ounce of superfluous flesh on his body, had seamanship reduced to a science and went through the world breathing good will to men.

After the mate had satisfied his mirth, Paul turned to him in a half-apologetic manner.

"Maybe I didn't put it to you in the right way. Of course, you know I have no desire to take actual command of the boat. I only wanted you to know that I am here by authority of my uncle."

The giant reached over and patted Paul on the shoulder.

"Why, sonny, you can just put it any way that suits you best. We're not thin-skinned about etiquette here and you can count on Job Singleton as a friend."

"Thank you," was the grateful response, "I may need a friend before this business is over."

"This business?" queried the mate, lifting his eyebrows, "what do you mean?"

Instantly Paul realized the embarrassment of being weighted down with a great secret.

He regretted his ill-advised words. He laid his hand on the giant's arm.

"I can say nothing further now, but if the occasion arises, I shall be more explicit."

"Yes, do," grunted Singleton, who had little relish for mysteries.

The mate seated himself beside Paul and for ten minutes the man and the boy remained there watching the rippling waves which alternately seemed to change from blue to green. The little crests of white, the great expanse of foam that followed the track of the steamer, and the sea gulls flying past the bow of the vessel, had a peculiar fascination for both of them. Paul's eyes sparkled at the unwonted sight, while Job Singleton relapsed into a contented silence. The man's eyes were soft and dreamy, and there was an extreme tenderness about him that is not commonly associated with the average seaman. Presently he lifted his hand and pointed in the distance.

"Do you see that patch of land off there?"

Paul confessed that he did not. The man handed him a pair of strong glasses.

"Now do you see it?"

"Yes; just faintly."

"Well, that's Miami on the coast of Florida. We'll pass that point during the night, and in the morning we'll be opposite the Bahama Islands. By that time you'll be glad enough to

take off some of your heavy clothing; you'll find your red sweater just a bit too warm."

"How long will it take us to reach Spanish-town?"

"Well," said the mate, changing his cud deliberately, "I should say it would be a matter of four or five days. It all depends on the kind of weather we get."

"The weather's fine," observed Paul.

"Yes, now," admitted the mate, "but you can't tell how it will be in twenty-four hours. It's mighty uncertain in this tropical section."

Paul made no reply to this. He sat looking ahead of him vacantly. Suddenly the mate took him by the arm.

"See here, boy; have you had any breakfast?"

"Why, no," answered Paul hesitatingly, "I believe I was forgetting all about it."

"That's a good joke for a sailor," cried Singleton with one of his hearty laughs; "you'll never be a seasoned sailor if you forget about your grub."

He blew a little whistle. A man responded immediately.

"Tell the cook I want him."

In a few moments the merry-looking fellow with the white cap and apron stood before him.

"Mike," said the mate, "this boy hasn't had a thing to eat yet; it's a terrible reflection on our hospitality."

The cook saluted, but did not deny the soft impeachment.

"What will I get for him?"

"Anything hot—and get it in a hurry."

"Where will I serve it?"

"In the main cabin. I'll stay there and keep him company."

In less than ten minutes the cook returned carrying a tray filled with edibles. While he was spreading it on the cabin table the mate said to Paul:

"After this things will move along more smoothly. You see, we had to get out in a hurry and almost forgot about you."

Paul started in on the bacon and eggs with a relish. He ate as only a growing and healthy boy can eat. The coffee, smoking hot, tasted delicious. As he finished the second cup, he turned to the mate with a smile.

"You didn't forget about me last night."

"Why not?"

"Because you took the trouble to lock me in the Captain's cabin."

Singleton stared at the boy so long and so steadily that Paul became uncomfortable.

"Have I said anything improper?" he ventured.

"Please repeat your remark," ordered the mate.

"I merely said you locked me in the cabin last night."

Singleton drew a long breath.

"I never did anything of the kind."

Paul laughed uneasily.

"I suppose it was only a joke."

"It wasn't a joke or anything else," repeated the mate emphatically. "I never locked you in. That's hardly my notion of humor."

"But I was locked in," persisted Paul.

"How did you get out this morning?"

"I found the door unlocked."

"Was the key in it?"

"No."

"Well, I'll be darned."

"It wasn't very pleasant," suggested Paul.

"I should say not," admitted Singleton, "and I'd like to find out the man that did it. I can't imagine who'd play such monkey shines on this ship. None of the men would dare to come in the cabin and they would have to come in here to turn the key of the stateroom. Why didn't you give the alarm?"

"I did, but no one seemed to hear me."

"That's so; the gale was blowing like fury, and we were all on deck most of the night."

By this time Paul had finished his break-

fast. The mate started to go up the stairway and motioned the boy to follow him.

"Come on," he said, "you'd better get acquainted with all hands. After that, I'll try to get at the secret of this locking-in business."

Paul followed Job Singleton up the steps, feeling very much refreshed by his breakfast. As his head reached the top of the companionway, he looked casually toward the bow of the *Water Witch*. He noticed a man standing beside the pilot house. There was something strangely familiar about the fellow's broad back. Unconsciously Paul paused and began to ransack his memory to recall where he had seen that form before. Just at this moment the man turned and exposed his face to the gaze of the boy.

Paul gasped.

There could be no mistaking those beady eyes; that red, swollen face; the stubby nose and the leering lips, tightly grasping the short-stemmed pipe.

It was Bill Rambo.

The boy stood on the steps motionless. The mate turned to him, half impatiently:

"Why don't you come up?"

Paul pointed his finger in the direction of Rambo.

"Who is that man?"

The mate looked searchingly at the bulky figure before replying, then he said carelessly:

“That; oh, that’s the new Captain of the *Water Witch*.”

CHAPTER V

BILL RAMBO DEMONSTRATES THAT HE IS A PERSON WHO MUST BE CONSIDERED

FOR fully half a minute, Paul Parker stood in silence staring at Bill Rambo. The mate's words rang in his ears, "that's the new Captain of the *Water Witch*." Job Singleton, unconscious of the fact that Paul had not followed him, strode toward the bow of the boat and engaged in conversation with Rambo. The boy looked at them for a few moments longer, and then retreated to the cabin. The mere presence of the disreputable one was ominous. The fact that he was masquerading as the Captain of the *Water Witch* made the situation critical, if not perilous.

Paul felt that he must have time to think the situation over calmly and deliberately, so he retired into his stateroom and, locking the door, sat on his bunk and tried to collect his thoughts. To begin with, he had no doubt that Rambo was the man who had imprisoned him in the room the night before. The pur-

pose was evident; the man wanted time enough to impose himself upon Job Singleton as the authorized skipper of the vessel. At this thought, Paul instantly recalled the letter he was to present to the mate, and the key of the golden chest which Captain Hawkins had hung about his neck. Instinctively he rushed to his coat and felt in the inside pocket. He breathed a sigh of relief. The envelope was there, perfectly safe and sound. After that he reached for the bag. It hung about his neck just as it had been placed there by his uncle.

The question now was what should be done with the impostor. Paul, while courageous enough, had a fair share of prudence, so he considered the question from all points of view. Should he risk a quarrel with Bill Rambo by telling the truth? Or would it be wise to close his eyes to the imposition by simply pretending that he was on his uncle's boat for the purpose of taking a pleasure trip? He debated the question for some minutes. To keep silent now might lead to troublesome complications in the future. Besides, it looked cowardly to dodge the issue. His decision was soon made. He would expose the adventurer, and, as long as it was necessary to do so, he would expose him in a dramatic and effective way. Paul put on his coat

and hastened to the deck. The mate and the false master were still talking. Paul walked toward them in a resolute manner. Singleton, who was facing him, nodded carelessly. Rambo did not see him at first. The boy planted himself in such a position that he could look the big fellow square in the eye. He felt, somehow, that when Rambo turned and saw him there, he would discard his mask and confess to the deception. He resolved, on his part, to waste no time with affected politeness. He cleared his throat and exclaimed loudly:

“Bill Rambo!”

The bulky form turned slowly until the little beady eyes looked directly at the boy, but there was no surprise or fear there; only a half sneer and a grin of amusement.

“Hello, sonny.”

This form of salutation was slightly disconcerting. It detracted from the dignity which Paul was trying his best to maintain. He braced up, however, and said sharply:

“I suppose you know who I am?”

The Goliath of the quarter-deck calmly surveyed this new David before replying. He actually laughed, and when he spoke his stinging words were delivered with indifferent tolerance:

"Why, sure; you're the brat that pinched my fingers up at Captain Hawkins' house."

Paul's face crimsoned. He spoke hotly:

"Yes, where you were eavesdropping."

"Paul! Paul!" expostulated Job Singleton, taking him by the arm, "that's no way to talk to your superior."

"He's not my superior!" blurted the boy.

"Come, come," said the mate, annoyed, "you must not talk that way."

"Let the kid have his swing," interrupted Rambo, "I don't mind it."

"But I do," insisted the mate. "We can't stand for that sort of thing on shipboard."

"I've got something to say to you," said Paul, defiantly.

"Say it."

"I will; call all hands on deck to hear it."

Job Singleton was about to express himself in a decisive manner, but Rambo interrupted him.

"Humor him; as long as I don't mind, you needn't care."

The loud talking attracted several of the men. They stood about with wide open mouths. The mate would have dismissed them, but something in the boy's manner deterred him.

"Mr. Singleton and men!" cried Paul in a

loud voice, "I am here to perform a duty to the dead and to you."

No one stirred; no one spoke.

"I am here to denounce that man," he continued, pointing his finger in the direction of Bill Rambo, "as a fraud and an impostor."

There were some eager faces among the spectators. Every eye turned to Rambo to see how he would take this sort of talk, but the man was absolutely impassive. There was just the suspicion of a sneer about his lips, but he kept them closed with marvelous self-restraint. The mate was the only man who moved. He stepped toward Paul and said sharply:

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that this man who is parading as the Captain of the *Water Witch* has no authority for holding the position."

"Who has?"

"I have."

"Do you mean to say that you are authorized to act as the Captain of this vessel?"

"That's just what I mean to say."

The men crowded closer; they had been reinforced by arrivals from below. For the moment, all discipline was forgotten. Once again every eye turned to Bill Rambo. He was expected to speak. He calmly stuck his hand in his pocket, and pulling out a plug of

tobacco, cut a big piece off and began rubbing it together for smoking purposes. The mate turned to him:

"You hear the boy?"

"Well, I'm not deaf."

"What have you got to say about it?"

"It seems to me," said Rambo, "that you've got all the say. You're second in command. If you are going to have any order or system on this boat, you'd better settle this difficulty here and now."

"I agree with you," answered the mate decisively; "I'll do it."

"That sounds like business," grinned the other.

"Well, the boy claims the right to sail the ship."

"I met a sailor once who claimed to be the King of England," retorted Rambo. "He couldn't get any one to believe him, though."

"You mean—"

"I mean that if I were you, I'd ask the boy to show his authority."

The mate turned to Paul:

"You've made a serious claim; have you any authority to back it up?"

"I have," replied Paul. "I've a letter from Captain Hawkins which explains everything."

Every eye turned from Bill Rambo and was

leveled on the boy. He put his hand in his pocket, and, pulling out the precious envelope, handed it to Job Singleton.

"Just look at that," he said with the jauntiness due, no doubt, to extreme youth.

The mate took the little square thing, and, putting his hand in it, pulled out a brown sheet of paper. He opened it carefully,—the sheet was perfectly blank.

Paul gasped for breath.

The mate swore softly.

"If this is a practical joke, it's gone too far."

"It's no joke," said Paul bitterly.

Rambo, who had stepped into the background, was leering at him in a malignant manner. The boy caught the man's gaze and it did not reassure him.

"I had a letter."

"Possibly," assented the mate. "All I want to know is whether you can produce authority of any sort."

The boy fished through every one of his pockets, but the search was fruitless. He had no credentials.

The men began to laugh. One of them made a remark concerning the wise old saying that children should be seen and not heard. The mate turned on them quickly:

"Go back to your posts at once."

The sailors started to leave and Paul moved off with them. Singleton tapped him on the shoulder.

"One moment, please."

The boy halted. The mate turned to Bill Rambo.

"Messmate," said Singleton, with a touch of the eloquence which he sometimes displayed when very much in earnest, "the boy has not been able to give me anything to back up his claim, but come to think of it, that does not settle your claim. Now, I think it is only fair to ask if you can prove your authority to take charge of this ship?"

"You bet I can," mumbled Rambo, "I'm always on hand with the goods."

"What have you?"

"I'll soon show you," he said, diving into his back pocket. "The last act of Captain Hawkins' life was to give me this authority. I s'pose that's what made the boy so jealous."

Paul felt himself growing faint. What in the world could Rambo have to show Singleton. The suspense did not last long. The big fellow finally picked out one letter from a number of others and handed it to the mate.

"Just cast your optics over that."

Singleton read it slowly and laboriously. After that he droned it out aloud for the

benefit of the young claimant. It was as follows:

"To whom it may concern:

*"I authorize the bearer to take
command of the Water Witch.*

"JAMES HAWKINS."

Paul, standing on tiptoe, read the letter in the mate's hand. He had been robbed. His heart sank. He, who had expected to do so much, had failed dismally. Bill Rambo was master of the situation.

CHAPTER VI

BILL RAMBO, TAKING CHARGE OF THE "WATER WITCH," PROVES HIS ABILITY TO THREATEN AND COMMAND

THE next morning Bill Rambo assumed command of the *Water Witch*, and from the way he went about it, there could be no doubt but that he knew his business. He gave his orders in a loud voice, and the sailors recognized in it the ring of authority. He had dressed a bit for the part, too, and presented quite an imposing appearance. He had treated himself to a clean shave and that made a noticeable difference in the broad red face. To be sure, it was still far from handsome, but beauty counts for little on the rolling deep. His first visit was to the pilot house. The man at the wheel turned, but before he could say anything, Rambo had spoken in his quick, authoritative way.

"How do you find things, Davidson?"

"Everything fair, Captain," said the man; "we're just off the Bahama Islands."

The cluster of miniature islands off the

coast of Florida shone and sparkled in the sunlight with the brilliancy of beautiful gems in a greenish setting. The air was mild and balmy, and it was necessary to discard part of the heavy clothing that had been merely comfortable when the steamer left Lewes. The Captain proceeded on his rounds. Moving along the deck, he passed the galley. The cook was hard at work peeling potatoes.

"Mike, your coffee this morning wasn't fit for a pig to drink."

"Why, I—"

"No arguments; no explanations," cried the Captain, cutting the man off abruptly; "what we need is better cooking. If you don't give it to us, we'll know the reason why."

Before Mike Moran could recover his breath, the Captain had hurried on and was harrying other members of the crew. His purpose was evident. He meant to establish his authority in a way that could not be questioned. He stumbled against a man lying on the deck, half asleep. Rambo gave him a deliberate kick.

"Get out of there, you lazy dog, and shake a leg."

The man got up and limped away with the downcast look of a beaten cur. This non-resistance fed the vanity and the cruelty of the new Captain. The beady eyes seemed to

have sunk deeper than ever in the man's head, and they shone with an air of undisguised malignity. The stubby nose stuck out with unusual aggressiveness. The straight mouth with the drawn ends sneered perpetually. Bill Rambo abandoned his blue collarless coat, his knit jacket and his old trousers and had replaced them with a faded blue suit with brass buttons he had found in the Captain's room. As he bustled along a tiny stream of tobacco juice ran down the side of his mouth. He carelessly lifted up his big left hand and wiped the back of it across his mouth, which, it must be confessed, was a very uncaptain-like act.

The chief mate and Paul Parker were standing near the stern of the boat. The boy had slept in the mate's stateroom the night before. Singleton turned to him.

"The Captain's coming; be polite; he has the whip-hand."

"Hello," sneered Rambo, "what are you two whispering about?"

"About nothing improper, Captain," said the mate with a salute.

"You seem to be very good friends."

"Quite natural for me to have a friendly feeling toward the nephew of my late Captain," observed Singleton coolly.

"Well, your late Captain's not in command

now; your duty is to your present Captain—and I'm that man."

Singleton saluted again with irritating precision.

"I know you and I know my duty," he said. "I don't think you'll have any reason to complain."

"What were you saying to the boy when I came along?" demanded Rambo sharply.

"I was just giving him some advice," replied the mate.

"What kind of advice?" this threateningly.

"Good advice," this very softly.

The new Captain swore to himself. He was about to walk away when he changed his mind and once again faced the man and the boy.

"I might as well have you understand my position here; I'm the Captain of this boat."

"Aye, aye, sir," responded Singleton glibly.

Paul was silent.

Rambo gave him a fierce look out of his small eyes.

"What about you? You're quiet."

Paul caught the significant glance of the mate, and turning to the Captain, said with parrot-like quickness:

"Aye, aye, sir."

This meaningless answer mollified Rambo.

"Boy," he said, "I 'spose I ought to throw

you overboard for your impudence to your superiors, but I won't. I'm going to give you a chance. You can take it or leave it. I'm going to make you the errand boy of this boat. Does that hurt your sailor pride? Eh?"

Paul was silent.

"Because if it does, I'll set you to swabbing off the decks and emptying the garbage for the cook. It's quite a come-down from being the Captain of the boat to acting as chief bottle washer for the cook, isn't it?"

Warned by a glance from the mate, Paul responded with a mechanical:

"Aye, aye, sir."

"That's about all for the present," said Rambo, "but if you come any of your funny business, you'll make a nice tasty bit for the sharks."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Paul, from force of habit.

"As for you, Mate," said the speaker, "I'll thank you to have a little better discipline on board this boat. The men don't seem to understand their position. I passed a fellow a little while ago who forgot to salute. I'm going below now to take a snooze and I expect every man to do his duty."

He made his way to the staircase and went down into the cabin. Paul drew a breath of relief. Singleton proceeded about his work.

An hour later they met again. Paul drew up to him a trifle timidly. The mate was such a reticent man that he scarcely knew how to take him. Finally he found courage to speak.

"Mr. Singleton," he said earnestly, "I told you the truth. That paper was given to me by my uncle. Rambo's a fraud."

"Not so loud; not so loud," whispered the mate.

"But I'm telling you the truth."

"I know it, and I believe you, but we must act cautiously or all will be lost. Bill Rambo's a desperate man. He's taking big chances, and we can't be too careful."

"I'm so glad you believe in me."

"Of course I do, but we've got to get our bearings, lad. I've been sizing up the situation ever since we had the scene yesterday. I've figured it out that Rambo has the best of us now."

"How?"

"Why, he's stolen the ship—that's the long and short of it."

"But how could he do that?"

Singleton smiled grimly.

"He's done it; that's how."

"But you and the crew; you're all faithful to my uncle?"

"Yes, what's left of us."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, that counting you and me, there are only six persons on the *Water Witch* we can depend upon."

"But the others?"

"They are all men belonging to Rambo. He brought them on the boat at Lewes. The other members of the original crew are still on land wondering why we sailed without them."

"When did you discover this?"

"Just after we sailed."

"Why didn't you prevent it?"

"How could I when Rambo was in command? He gave me a plausible tale in the beginning. Since then he's backed it up with the written authority of Captain Hawkins."

Paul Parker sat still for a long while, a look of blank wonder on his young face. His thirst for information was unsatisfied.

"How many can Rambo depend on?"

"Nine," was the laconic reply.

"Then it's nine to six?" said Paul.

"That appears to be the score," grinned the mate.

Suddenly the boy's face brightened.

"I think you've forgotten some of the men. Nine and six make fifteen. We've eighteen on board."

"Very true," admitted the mate, "but three of them are what we call neutrals or non-combatants."

"Who are they?"

"The engineer and the two firemen."

"But they might be with us in a pinch," insisted Paul eagerly.

"Yes, they might," was the skeptical response. "You never can tell."

"Who are our friends?" asked the boy.

"Well, you and I—we're all right," said the mate, smiling at Paul's persistence.

"Yes, and who else?"

"Mike Moran, the cook; I know we can count on him."

"And the others?"

"The others are three of the crew—they sailed around the Horn with me twice. I know they'll stand by me until the last ditch."

"How about the second mate?"

"Eli Dutton?"

"Yes."

"Oh, he'll stick to Rambo. They're birds of a feather. You can depend on it they'll hang together."

"Have you thought about Mark Logan?"

"Oh, yes; he's the handy man about the boat; he's not worth thinking about."

"Why not?"

"He'll be with Rambo sure."

"But I saw the Captain—I mean Rambo—kick him this morning. He walked off with a nasty look on his face."

"That don't make any difference. Kicks don't count with a fellow like that. The worse you treat 'em, the closer they stick to you."

"I don't know about that," said Paul, shaking his head doubtfully. "Human nature is human nature."

"Yes," said the mate bitterly. "When you've seen more of some kinds of human nature, you won't feel so confident about it. He's the sort of fellow that will be for the boss no matter how badly the boss treats him."

The weather was perfect and the *Water Witch* sailed along as smoothly and as swiftly as a bird with outstretched wings. They were still within sight of the Bahama Islands, and the fragrance of those sweet-smelling haunts of perpetual summer was wafted across the decks of the boat. There was scarcely a ripple on the waters, and the sky was unflecked with a single cloud. Paul carried a message to the man at the wheel, and also did some odd chores for the mate. After that he lay on the broad of his back on one of the hatches and gazed at the blue vault above him. The treachery on the boat was in such contrast to the frankness of Nature that the boy, for the time being, forgot his surroundings. While he lay there the mate passed him.

"Eli Dutton and Bill Rambo are in the cabin

together," he whispered. "They have a bottle of rum between them, and I've no doubt they are cooking up some deviltry."

Paul could not forbear a gentle smile. The placid waters and the beautiful sky seemed like a benediction; above everything so fair, and below, foul plotting. He remained there for some time. After that he hunted up the chief mate. An idea had occurred to him.

"Mr. Singleton," he said, "you told me that six of the old men were left ashore at Lewes. Won't they be surprised?"

"Surprise won't be no name for it," cried the mate. "I know sailors when they're left ashore. They'll be going around like a lot of chickens with their heads off."

"Won't they suspect something's wrong?"

"They'll be sure of it. I don't know anything as suspicious as a sailor. There'll surely be something doing in the old town of Lewes."

"Don't you think they'll be likely to go to Aunt Susan with their troubles?"

"She'll be the first one they'll go to."

"That sounds good for us."

"Sure. She'll talk to some of the authorities in the town and when they find that Bill Rambo has disappeared and that those sailors have been left behind, they'll know that something crooked's going on."

"What will they do?"

"I'm not a mind reader, my son, but I think it's dollars to cents that they'll contrive to notify the United States Consul at Jamaica. In that event Bill Rambo will be met at the wharf by an official of our government to whom he'll have to give an account of his doings."

"That makes me feel hopeful," said the boy. Singleton smiled.

"Hopeful! I'm more than hopeful. All we have to do, as the saying goes, is to sit still and not rock the boat, and we'll come out all right."

CHAPTER VII

PAUL ASTONISHES A FORMER FOE BY RETURN- ING GOOD FOR EVIL

ON the morning of the fourth day, the *Water Witch* passed out of sight of the Bahama Islands and came within spy-glass view of the Windward Channel, that waterway of commerce which has Cuba on one side and San Domingo on the other. Paul Parker, who stood in front of the pilot house, hungrily drinking in the magnificent panorama that lay unrolled before him, realized that they were in the tropics. The air was warm and balmy without being oppressive. The sea was dotted with little fragments of islands, most of them too insignificant for habitation. Gazing at one of these cubes of land through a pair of strong glasses, Paul beheld a great bed of pansies in full bloom. The beauty of this unexpected sight, and the fragrance it suggested, stood out in marked contrast with the final blasts of chilly winter which they had left behind only a few days before.

While Paul was admiring the wonders of

Nature, Bill Rambo and Eli Dutton, the second mate, were in the cabin deadening what little sensibility they possessed with the aid of a bottle of Scotch whisky. "The new Captain," as Job Singleton insisted upon calling him, had discovered a case of spirits in one of the lockers, and immediately started in to enjoy it as one of the perquisites of his self-appointed position.

"Dutton," said the big fellow with heavy solemnity, "are you sure the *Water Witch* is known in the West Indies?"

"Better than I am," answered the mate, helping himself to another glass of rum.

"And you say Singleton and the kid expect to recover the ship when we run into Jamaica."

"I didn't say that," corrected Dutton. "What I said was that I overheard the mate and the kid talking about the possibilities after we reached shore. They said what I know and everybody knows, and that is that the *Water Witch* is a marked ship. Her white sides and her big white smokestack are known to every seafaring man in this part of the globe. Consequently, if word got to Jamaica that she'd been stolen, we'd all be nabbed the minute we touched dry land."

"Do you think so?" asked Rambo, staring at him through bleary eyes.

"I don't think so; I know so. This sea

law's an awful thing. I know it because I've been up against it."

Rambo brought his brawny hand down on the table with a resounding whack.

"If that fellow Singleton tries any funny business on this ship, I'll make him walk the plank; I will, as sure as gun's iron."

Dutton pushed the bottle over.

"Have a drink on me, Captain."

The big fellow laughed at the pleasantry. He poured out four fingers of the stuff and drained it at a single gulp.

"The question," he said, "is how to disguise this ship so she won't be known. She's too darn pretty anyway; puts on airs like all of her sex."

A noise on deck interrupted the conference. Dutton hurried up the steps with agility, taking his place in the bow of the boat. Rambo followed more slowly and less steadily. As he reached the top step he bumped into Mark Logan. He let out an oath.

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing."

"That's no way to speak to your superior."

"It's the only way I know."

As the man spoke, he walked off until he was three or four yards from Rambo.

"Come back here and apologize," shrieked the Captain.

"I'll not," said the man sullenly. "Besides, I'm sick and tired of your bulldozing."

Rambo reached over and picked up a marlinespike that lay on top of the hatchway and hurled it at the sailor. It struck him on the side of the head and glanced off, leaving an ugly flesh wound. The blood gushed out, covering the side of the man's face. The sight of the red stain made a demon of the drunken Captain. He picked up a broken oar and made a savage rush for the wounded man. At this critical moment, Job Singleton appeared on the scene. He came forward swiftly with a cat-like tread. Rambo raised the wooden club in the air ready to crash it on the skull of the defenseless man, when he suddenly felt it wrenched from his grasp, and the next instant saw it spinning through the air and off into the water.

He turned with a shriek of rage and found Job Singleton, quiet and self-contained, confronting him. For a few minutes he behaved like a maniac. His first impulse was to strike the mate, but there was something about that pale, determined face that deterred him.

"What do you mean?" he shouted.

"I meant to save you from becoming a murderer," responded the other, and then as if it were an afterthought he added, "I think I succeeded."

This statement was so true that it could not be combated, so Rambo adopted another tack.

"Who's Captain on this boat?"

"You are."

"And my orders are to be obeyed?"

"Surely."

"Then why did you interfere?"

"I didn't—at least not with your orders. I only saved that man's life."

The vindictiveness of the beady little eyes would have startled a less courageous man, but Singleton, while cautious and on his guard, was unafraid. The Captain broke forth explosively:

"I'm going to have discipline on this boat."

"I'll help you in that," was the mate's calm reply.

"That fellow talked back to me," shouted Rambo, pointing to Mark Logan, who stood in the background, wiping the blood from his face.

Singleton made no reply. He felt that further parley was useless. He had accomplished his purpose.

"I'm going to punish him!"

The mate quietly walked away. It was as if he were telling the Captain to go as far as he liked—short of murder.

Rambo was relieved. In spite of his loud

voice and bullying ways he felt a wholesome restraint in the presence of Job Singleton. He turned to Logan.

"Get into the forecastle."

The seaman obeyed. The Captain motioned to two burly sailors and the three followed the recalcitrant one. Paul Parker looked after the party with curious eyes, but he dared not follow. He stood near an open hatchway and listened, but no sounds came from below. He feared that Rambo in his sodden condition might attempt to flog the unfortunate Logan, and in that event there was no telling what might follow. Five, ten, fifteen minutes went by with nothing to indicate what was going on in the hold. At the end of that time the Captain reappeared. He was flushed and there was a smirk of satisfaction on his forbidding face. Paul longed to ask what had been done to the sailor, but was discreetly silent. Besides, he might be the next victim, and there was no need of courting trouble. Dutton came along just then, and he and the Captain went into the cabin together, laughing boisterously.

For the next three hours Paul was kept so busily employed that he had no time to think of Mark Logan. Singleton, who was in command, did not have the opportunity of speaking to the boy. Presently there came a lull.

No one was in sight, and Paul crept silently down the ladder and made his way to the fore-castle. Three of the men were engaged at cards. A fourth was playing a wheezy old accordion, while another lay on his back fast asleep. Logan was not in sight. The boy picked his way carefully through the stuff strewn about the floor and pushing open a door, found himself in a bare compartment in the very bow of the boat. It was almost dark, the only thing that lighted up the sordid-looking place being a dirty-paned lantern. As soon as he got his bearings Paul peered about anxiously. He discerned a form lying prostrate on a heap of straw.

"Hist!" he whispered.

A groan came from somewhere.

"Is that you, Logan?" called the boy.

"Yes," came in a weakened voice; "I'm in the corner."

Paul hastened in the direction of the voice. The sight that met his gaze was sickening. The light shed its ghastly rays on the man's face. One side was covered with clotted blood. His eyes were dulled; his movements feeble and spiritless.

Paul reached out his hand.

"Get up," he said.

A wan smile crossed the man's face.

"I can't."

"Why not?" asked Paul, alarmed.

"I'm in irons," was the sententious reply.

A glance verified the statement. A pair of rusty handcuffs were about his two wrists, while the feet were manacled and weighted down with a heavy iron ball.

"This is an outrage!" exclaimed Paul, honest indignation tingling through his frame.

"So it is," murmured the man, a quizzical look in his eyes, "but what are you going to do about it?"

Paul stooped down and examined the irons. They were very old and very rusty.

"I thought the day for this sort of thing had passed," he said.

"Evidently it hasn't," commented the victim dryly.

"I never dreamt that Captain Hawkins would have them on his ship," cried Paul bitterly.

"Captain Hawkins never put a man in irons in his life," was the quick reply. "These old manacles are relics of by-gone days. Rambo dug 'em up from a lot of junk."

"Do they hurt?"

Logan made a bitter face.

"Hurt's no name for it. I feel as if I had a ton of iron on me."

"Can I do anything for you?" asked Paul, anxiously.

"Yes," said the other eagerly; "I'm almost dying of thirst. Get me a drink."

Almost before he had finished speaking, Paul was gone. He hastened on deck. Job Singleton had just gone off duty. The boy went to his room.

"Mr. Singleton," he said, "have you a bottle of wine to spare?"

"Why, yes," was the hesitating reply, "but I don't think it's a good thing for a youngster like you to go into the wine-bibbing business."

"I'm not going to drink it," he said, excitedly. "You mustn't ask me who it's for, either. Just give it to me as a personal favor."

The mate reached down into his locker and pulled out a pint bottle of claret.

"Here you are," he said, looking at the bottle reluctantly. "It's something we don't often use, except in case of sickness, but I can't see how I'm going to deny your request."

"Oh, thank you!" was the boyish response. Paul started off, but had only gone a few steps when he turned and came back.

"I don't want to be a nuisance," he said by way of introduction, "but would you mind giving me a few of the ship's biscuits?"

"I'm not the cook," was the abrupt reply.

The suggestion was enough. Paul hastened to the cook's galley. Mike Moran was there

hard at work, and the boy repeated his request.

"It's against the rules," said the cook.

"Is it?" asked Paul innocently.

"Sure, but what's the rules between friends?" and the good-hearted Irishman filled a bag with the hardtack and pushed it into the boy's hands.

Silently he crept down into the forecastle and thence into the hold of the vessel. In a few minutes he was beside the prisoner.

"What have you got there?" cried Logan.

"Something to make your mouth water."

And so it did. The man's eyes glistened while Paul pried out the cork with the end of his penknife. The sailor seized the bottle and drank from it tremblingly. After that he ate the biscuits ravenously. He fell back with a sigh of contentment.

"Boy," he said, "you're an angel in disguise."

Paul smiled.

"I'm glad you think so, but I'm afraid I'm very human."

In the meantime, he had been examining the irons with great care. After his scrutiny was finished, he turned to Logan.

"I believe these things are locked with a key."

"So they are," replied the sailor. "What about that?"

"Nothing, only I think I saw a bunch of keys hanging on a peg as I came into this place."

"Please don't raise my hopes," moaned the prisoner.

Paul did not reply. Instead he felt his way over to the other side of the hold. A big bunch of keys dangled from a hook on the wall. He pulled them down and hastened back to Mark Logan. The dim light made it very difficult to work, but he tried one key after another with infinite patience. The handcuffs were the first object of his care. Many minutes went by and he made but slow progress. One key was too large; another too small, and so on. Finally he reached the last key. His heart palpitated; if this failed him, the poor fellow would have to keep his irons on indefinitely, but it did not fail him. It was the magic wand that unloosed the irons. They fell to the floor with a crash. He tried the same key on the manacles that held the numbed legs together. Once again it worked, and the shackles dropped off the torn and bleeding ankles.

"Now you must lie quiet here," whispered Paul. "Don't move. Don't let any one know you are freed. Keep those chains near you. If Rambo or Dutton come down, pretend you are still in irons. Do you understand?"

"I do."

"I'll bring you something to eat in the morning; until then lie quiet. I'll talk to Singleton and maybe he can advise us the right thing to do."

"Yes."

Paul started away. He had gone only a few steps when he felt some one plucking at his coat. It was Logan. The man's hands trembled. In the dim light, Paul could see the tears in his eyes. He tried to master his emotion sufficiently to speak. When he did, it was a single word.

"Boy!"

"Yes," said Paul.

"I came on the boat with Rambo," said the sailor brokenly, "prepared to do his dirty work. You knew I was no friend of yours, yet you've returned good for evil. Boy, if I can ever serve you, count on me to the death."

And Paul, looking at the man, his eyes filled with unshed tears, knew that he meant what he said.

CHAPTER VIII

THE "WATER WITCH" SUDDENLY CHANGES HER
NAME FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE

JOB SINGLETON was in command of the ship that night, and try as he would, Paul could not steal an opportunity of telling him what he had done in the case of Mark Logan. After pondering over it for awhile, he decided to let events take their course, and with this philosophic conclusion, he went to his berth and slept like a top. As he emerged on deck the next morning, he found the air still more balmy and noticed that the *Water Witch* was skirting the northern side of the island of Cuba. He thought it curious that a vessel bound for Jamaica should get so far out of the channel. At first he thought he might be mistaken, but presently the nose of the boat was headed directly for one of the little bays nestling on the Cuban coast.

He went to the mate's room to find out if he could give any explanation, but learned that he was still on watch. Eli Dutton had complained of illness, and Singleton, with

characteristic generosity, had relieved him for the remainder of the night. He hurried on deck again and espied the first mate standing in the bow of the boat. He started to go toward him when Bill Rambo intercepted him.

"Boy, go down into my cabin and clean up the table."

Paul stood still, amazed. It was the first time Rambo had ordered him to do any menial work. The hesitation angered the Captain.

"You lazy whelp, go and do as I say. What do you mean, standing there gazing at me?"

The boy did as he was bid. He knew it would be folly to mutiny. Also he realized that Rambo was getting ready to throw off all disguise—that it was only a question of time when he would openly proclaim his piratical intentions.

As Paul walked away, Singleton approached.

"I say, Captain," he remarked. "We seem to be drifting towards Cuba."

"I know it," he answered; "it's by my orders. I wanted to get a closer look at that coast. We won't go in very far and after that will return to the channel."

The reply satisfied the mate. He raised his hand in salutation.

"All right; thought you might not have noticed it."

After a moment's silence, Rambo said:

"See here, Singleton, you go down in your berth and get some sleep."

"Oh, I'll stick the watch out, Captain," volunteered the mate.

"How long have you been on watch?"

"Oh, I don't know—eleven or twelve hours."

"That's too much," insisted the Captain. "You go down, and I'll put Dutton in your place. He's all right now."

Nothing loath, Singleton obeyed. Exhausted nature asserted itself. He went to sleep almost as quickly as his head touched the pillow.

Paul Parker, at the other end of the ship, was wondering when he could get into communication with the mate. After he had cleaned up the table in the Captain's cabin, he started to go upstairs, but at the top he was met by the scowling face of Bill Rambo.

"Go down there," the man shouted. "You get that old log-book and copy it in one of those blank books that ain't been used, and do it right, too. If you make a single mistake, I'll flog you."

"The log for last year?" asked Paul.

"That's what I said."

"But what's the use. It seems like a waste—"

He got no further.

"You lubberly starfish! If you give me any more back talk, I'll lash you to the mast. Do as I say, and don't come up again until I send for you."

Paul retreated in good order. He began to do the copying in a mechanical fashion. He knew well enough that it was simply a device to get rid of him, but he realized that failure to take orders might result seriously. In the meantime his eyes and ears were on the alert. Presently the engine ceased pumping. The ship halted. There was a grinding sound, lasting for some minutes, followed by a splash, and he knew the anchor had been cast. The boy looked through the window of the cabin. They were in close to shore now—as close as it was possible to go without grounding the vessel. The water was quite low, so low that Paul wondered whether they had gotten stuck in the mud.

On deck everything was activity. Footsteps could be heard running in various directions. Soon he knew by the peculiarity of the sound that the small boats had been taken from the davits, and were being lowered in the water. Rambo, who was directing the men, shouted:

"Now when you fellows get down there, I

want you to work like the very fury. Do it and I'll double your allowance of grog for the next two days."

"Aye, aye, sir," came in chorus from the sailors.

There was silence for a few moments, and then came a scraping sound on the side of the boat. It did not proceed from any particular spot, but asserted itself in every section of the ship. It seemed as if a dozen men had simultaneously started to sandpaper the *Water Witch*. Paul was feverishly anxious to go out on deck and see what they were about, but a wholesome fear of that bloated face and those beady eyes restrained him. "Scrape," "Scrape," "Scrape," continued the sound with monotonous iteration. Paul kept up the pretense of copying the log-book, but it was a sad-looking piece of work. The pages of the new book were blurred with blots, while the boy's hands looked as if he had taken an ink bath, all of which reveals the regrettable fact that Paul Parker was not a tidy boy.

After two hours of the sing-song sound, the scraping ceased, and the hum of conversation began. The voice of Eli Dutton could be heard above the others.

"Put two pots in each boat and see how fast you can finish the job."

The men resumed their work with a will.

Occasionally the mate could be heard talking to them.

"Does it dry fast?" he asked.

"As fast as it goes on," answered a voice.

"Good," was the satisfied response. "As soon as you finish the first coat, go ahead with the second. Leave the smokestack and the figurehead until the last."

While Paul was pondering over these strange words and these strange doings, the door opened and Rambo came down into the cabin, followed by Dutton. The Captain paused at the top step to call out to some one on deck.

"As soon as you're ready, let me know."

Once in the cabin, he called to Paul.

"Let's see the log-book."

Paul handed him the book, not without an inward qualm. The man looked at it with a sneer. He passed it to Dutton. Rambo turned to the mate.

"What do you think of it?"

Dutton, being unable to frame a ready answer, was silent. The Captain answered himself.

"I think it's fierce; full of blots and blunders. It shows that the kid's no good. Just one of those chaps that thinks he knows it all, but never pulls off a clean job."

Paul flushed at these sarcastic references to

himself. He had a consuming desire to punch Rambo's head, but he knew that his time had not yet come. The Captain leered at him with his unlovely manner.

"You pinched my fingers once in the jamb of your uncle's door, didn't you? Well, you'll get every one of those pinches back with interest before I get through with you."

Paul made no answer.

"Let's have a drink, Captain," suggested Dutton.

"Boy," shouted Rambo, with an oath, "pass the bottle and the glasses."

Paul did so and stood in the attitude of a waiter, while the two coarse seamen started in on their debauch. After the fifth glass Rambo became sodden. He still showed a dull flickering anger toward Paul, but the boy felt that he was in no immediate danger. After an hour, a head appeared in the opening above.

"Captain?"

"Well?"

"It's ready now."

Rambo turned to Paul.

"Now, my beauty, I'm going to give you a surprise party. You were good to me and the least I can do is to return the compliment."

"What is it?" asked Paul, curiosity getting the better of his caution.

"It's a funeral and a christening," leered the Captain, "and I 'spose you'll be sorry and glad. Them's the proper emotions, ain't they?"

Paul looked puzzled.

"Take him up," ordered the Captain.

A sailor approached and tied a handkerchief around the boy's eyes. Thus blindfolded he was led on to the deck. Strangely enough, he felt no fear. The boards quivered, and he realized that the machinery was at work and that the ship was putting out to sea again. He felt, unconsciously, that he was heading toward the bow of the boat. When he got in the extreme end, he was turned around so that he faced the wheel-house.

"Now off with it," shouted Rambo.

The command was obeyed.

Paul rubbed his eyes for a few moments after the handkerchief had been removed. He glanced about curiously. A sense of unfamiliarity took possession of him. A big glaring pillar of red confronted him. It was the smokestack. He looked again. The pilot house and the sides of the boat looked somber. In a flash, the whole thing dawned on him. The *Water Witch* had been repainted. It had been pure white from stern to stern. Now, excepting the red smokestack, everything was an ugly black. Involuntarily, he

leaned over the side. The name had been scraped off, and there stenciled in its place in big white letters on the new black background were the words "*Sea Gull*."

Bill Rambo stood watching the boy, his big face beaming with drunken joy. To his peculiar nature it was a moment of great triumph. Paul could not restrain an exclamation.

"Well, this don't look much like the *Water Witch*."

"Certainly not," bawled the Captain. "The *Water Witch* is dead and buried, and the coffin's rotted and gone to the bottom of the sea. Good riddance, I say!"

"Every cloud has its silver lining though, Captain," suggested Eli Dutton, with a smirk.

"You bet," assented Rambo, "and in place of the *Water Witch*, we've got the beautiful *Sea Gull*, just born. She's a promising youngster, ain't she? Old Neptune's her father and mother and wet nurse and second cousin, all combined. I'm her sponsor and christener. Don't forget that, will you? That Bill Rambo lived to see the day that he could have a vessel of his own."

"Bravo, Captain!" cried Dutton, clapping his hands.

Singleton had appeared in the stairway. The drunken Captain turned to him.

“See here, you Mr. Nasty-nice mate. See that the men get all the grog they want. Do you hear that, boys? If you don’t get it, it’s Mr. Goody-goody’s fault.”

He turned to the second mate.

“Come on, Dutton. I’ve got a case of champagne below. We’ve got to celebrate this auspicious occasion. I’m a parent—the parent of the *Sea Gull*, and you know how a parent’s heart must feel at a time like this.”

There was an orgy in the forecastle that night, and toward morning, as Paul and Singleton paced the deck together, they could hear the popping of corks in the Captain’s cabin.

CHAPTER IX

THE CREW OF THE "SEA GULL" FIND THEMSELVES DIVIDED INTO RIVAL CAMPS

THE morning after the transformation by which the *Water Witch* became the *Sea Gull*, the vessel changed her course, and headed straight for the Windward Channel. It was a fair day, but there was a suspicious fleckiness about the sky—the sort of thing that portends a tropical storm. Job Singleton hummed a ditty as he paced the deck and gazed ahead on the bright waters, but the thoughts in his mind were by no means merry. The mere presence of Bill Rambo, ignorant, courageous and drink-crazed, was like having a stick of dynamite in the pantry. He felt, in a subconscious way, that matters were reaching a crisis, and that when the crucial moment arrived he would have to be prepared to act quickly and decisively.

His intuition was correct. Bill Rambo slept late as the result of his debauch the night before. He was in a very bad humor. His red face was redder than usual, and his little

beady eyes were dull and sullen. He came up the stairway slowly, as if his shaky legs were not equal to the task of navigating his heavy body. Singleton, alive to the etiquette of the sea, saluted his supposed superior, but Rambo gave only a porcine grunt, and staggered toward the forecastle. He disappeared down the companionway and the mate gave a sigh of satisfaction at the thought of being temporarily relieved of his unbearable presence. But his relief was short-lived. In a few minutes Rambo reappeared, shaking his fist in a frenzied manner. The stubby nose, shining like a carbuncle, stuck out with an aggressiveness that dared any one to utter a defiance. Singleton was standing amidships. Rambo rushed toward him with the wildness of a mad boar. Something about the man—his short legs, his top-heavy body and his thick neck—seemed to hit the whimsical side of the mate, and he burst into a hearty laugh. It was an unfortunate moment for mirth. Rambo, choking with rage, spluttered:—

“What are you laughing at?”

“Oh, nothing,” was the evasive reply; “I was just thinking.”

“No matter,” thundered the red-faced one, “I come to speak of something more important.”

“What is it?”

"Playing the innocent," sneered Rambo. "Well, it won't go with me. You've got to give an account of yourself. Now I want you to tell me why in darnation you released Logan?"

"Logan?"

"Yes, Logan. I put him in irons yesterday for talking back to me. You know all about it. You took the irons off him."

Singleton looked Rambo straight in the eye.

"I didn't do anything of the kind."

The Captain edged closer to the mate.

"Are you lying to me, Job Singleton?"

There was a dangerous glitter in the mate's eye.

"If you give me the straight lie," he retorted, "I'll answer you in a way you won't like."

Rambo, knowing his man, changed his tactics. He spoke again, still in a loud and insolent way.

"If you didn't unlock his chains, who did?"

"I did!"

The words came crisply. Both men turned at the sound. There before them, his arms akimbo, his eyes fearless and his manner confident, stood Paul Parker.

The Captain uttered a fearful oath.

"You brat," he added, "I'll teach you to get fresh on my boat."

As he spoke, he lunged forth with his right fist. If it had ever struck the boy, it would have knocked him senseless. But it was not to be. Singleton shot out one of his brawny arms, and when the *mêlée* was over Paul stood there uninjured, while the Captain lay sprawling his length on the deck. For a moment, he was stunned. As soon as he recovered his breath he emitted a roar like a wounded bull. He jumped to his feet, and pulling a whistle from his pocket, blew it three times.

In half a minute the deck was filled with men. Job Singleton, better than any man on board, realized the gravity of what had been done. He had committed an unpardonable offense. There could be no palliation; no compromise. Either Rambo or himself would have to be supreme on the newly christened *Sea Gull*, and if it were Rambo? He shuddered at the thought of the consequences. With it all, he was outwardly calm. This unlettered giant had poise and repose. He stood silent, with folded arms, awaiting the issue, but his eyes watched everything. One of the first heads to appear above the hatchway was that of Mark Logan—the cause of all the trouble. Rambo saw him first. An idea suggested itself—an idea that made the beady eyes sparkle with exultation.

“Logan,” he said, with cheerful mendacity,

"I've had you released, and I'm going to promote you to the position of first mate of this vessel. Your first duty will be to put that man in irons."

Logan's eyes blinked with mystification. Coming out of the black hold, it took him some moments to get accustomed to the glare of the sun. He sparred for time.

"What man?"

Rambo pointed a stubby forefinger in the direction of the mate. Logan looked in that direction. Paul Parker stood by the side of Singleton fearlessly—with the fearlessness that comes so grandly with the thoughtlessness of youth. The former prisoner realized the significance of the tableau. He spoke sullenly, but with decision.

"I won't do it!"

Rambo gasped with astonishment.

"The man's mutinied," he cried. "He knocked me down."

"I don't care."

"Do as I say or take the consequences," thundered the Captain.

"I'm through with doing your dirty work," retorted the man, with the first glimmer of manliness he had had in many a long day, "and if there's going to be a fight, I'm with Singleton and the boy."

And suiting the action to the word, he strode

over to where the first mate stood, and laid a rough but caressing hand on Paul's head. This action infuriated Rambo to such an extent that he lost the power of speech. But it was only for a moment. As soon as he could regain his voice, he shouted hoarsely:

"Line up, men! We've got a mutiny to quell, and we're going to do it quick!"

The men did line up, but not in a way to please the usurping Captain. Six of the sailors got back of him. Three others ran over and arrayed themselves with Job and Logan and Paul. Mike Moran, the cook, rushed up on deck in his white cap and apron, carrying a big cleaver with which he had been cutting meat. He looked around with amazement, but as soon as the meaning of the thing dawned on his alert brain, he quickly joined the forces of the first mate. He stood there brandishing the cleaver as if it were an instrument of war. Eli Dutton, who was present at the beginning of the controversy, sidled over toward Rambo. Captain and mate took a quick glance at their respective following. Numerically, the Captain had the better of it. The mate adopted a waiting policy. Suddenly, without the slightest warning, Rambo pulled a pistol from his pocket and aimed it straight at Singleton.

"I'll get rid of you," he shouted, "and then we'll attend to the others."

He pulled at the trigger, but it caught and did not explode. A thrill of horror went through every one. There was a pause of expectancy. Singleton was the most self-possessed man in the crowd. He made one step forward, and his long leg shot up into the air. The tip of his boot caught the handle of the revolver, it went flying upward and fell into the water with a splash. Rambo, howling with pain, made a savage rush for the mate, but two of the seamen, more judicious than their Chief, held him back. His rage made him froth at the mouth, but somehow he felt his own impotence. It would never do to show the white feather in such a crisis. The little beady eyes danced in his head. The effects of the whisky and the wine had worn off, leaving him in a sadly depressed state. His hand was bruised and swollen from the well-directed kick of Job Singleton's boot, but this served as a stimulant to his passion.

Job Singleton kept his presence of mind. He saw murder in the Captain's eye, but he never quailed. The blue orbs assumed a steely expression, and the gentle mouth was firm set. This tall, big-limbed man looked and acted as if his whole life had been a training to meet the exigencies of this particular moment. His quietness, suggestive of great reserve strength, inspired his followers with confidence, and

they stood there in silence waiting for the word of command.

Rambo cast a quick glance forward at the man who held the wheel.

"Davidson," he shouted, "come here."

Job Singleton spoke before the Captain had fairly finished, and his words came like shots from a rapid-firing gun.

"Davidson," he shouted, "your duty is at the wheel. Keep your eye on the compass—don't desert your post."

The last voice sounded like the voice of a real commander—and Davidson obeyed it. Also he was glad to be relieved from the embarrassment of fighting on either side.

The men still stood facing one another. The preliminaries were so long that some of them felt a bit foolish, but Singleton was resolved to act only on the defensive, and Rambo was half fearful of taking the aggressive. The mate, throwing a hasty look behind him, noticed the cook shaking his meat cleaver with the wildness of a Sioux Indian.

"Moran," he called, "throw that away, and be quick about it."

"If I do," retorted the cook, "the other fellows will get it."

"Throw it overboard," commanded Singleton.

The cook obeyed with a wry face. The

action produced a general laugh and relieved the tension—temporarily.

Rambo realized that if he was to do anything, the time had arrived. Delay meant utter defeat.

"Men," he shrieked, "I want that long-legged lobster placed in irons."

Both sides made a simultaneous rush. They were weaponless, except for the fists with which all had been generously provided by nature. It was to be man to man. A brawny seaman on Singleton's side struck one of Rambo's men a terrific clip behind the ear. It stunned him; the fellow staggered heavily against the frail rail which guarded the gangway. It slipped out of place, and he fell into the water. He never came to the surface again, and the *Sea Gull* steamed merrily ahead, oblivious of the fact that a human being had gone down to feed the fishes at the bottom of the sea.

In the first fierce onslaught, Eli Dutton and Job Singleton clinched. The first mate tripped over some substance on the deck and Dutton had the big fellow down on his knees. Bill Rambo, in the rear of the two men, struck out wildly with his fists. One sailor was knocked down and fell on his face. Another cleverly ducked the blow and stepped aside to engage in combat with a seaman

who was more to his size. Rambo went ahead, his fists working like battering rams. Presently he came face to face with Paul Parker. A smile of satisfaction crossed his homely countenance, and opening his hand, he gave the boy a terrific slap across the side of the jaw.

Paul moved back a pace. Every drop of blood in his body was tingling with anger. He side-stepped, and doubling up his sinewy hand struck Rambo a body blow, but it was as if he had hit a punching-bag. His fist flew back, and Rambo, a malignant look in his beady eyes, prepared to vent his long-felt revenge against the youngster. Paul had recovered his presence of mind and resolved to worst this ugly giant or die in the attempt. He shot out his right hand a second time and hit Rambo directly under the left eye. The effect was almost instantaneous. The big man's flesh began to swell and in a few minutes the eye was half closed. The boy, as light on his feet as a ballet dancer, lifted his left fist and gave his opponent a terrific blow under the chin. It was disconcerting. The Captain incautiously left his face unguarded, and Paul rained the blows on him so fast and so hard that Rambo yelled with pain. He retreated a step or two, and the youthful fighter gave him a red-hot blow on the

tip of the stubby nose. It brought the blood, and while the red fluid ran down his chin, the youngster kept up the cannonading with his two well-trained fists. The men in the immediate vicinity made way for these two fighters. A swift glance told Paul that the mate and his followers were rapidly getting the better of the Captain's men. Singleton had Dutton on the deck and was pounding heavy blows on his defenseless body.

In the temporary lull, Rambo struck out and caught Paul on the side of the face. It was notice to the boy that the battle was not yet won; also, it aroused his fighting blood for the second time. He jumped about on his feet with an elasticity that puzzled and annoyed the older man. The Captain began to puff, his wind was giving way. The boy realized his advantage and pitched in again, the blows following one another with a vigor that would have done credit to a trained athlete. Every time his fist shot out, he thought of the way in which he had been wronged by this short-legged man with the big head, and the reflection gave added strength to his efforts. Unexpectedly, Paul shot out his right leg and the burly fellow tripped over it and fell face forward on the deck. He jumped up with astonishing agility, and with a roar that sounded more like a mad animal than a human

being, made a savage rush at the boy. Just as he reached him, Paul moved aside, and doubling up his fist gave him a fearful blow back of the left ear. Rambo reached for the rail for support, but it was not there. He had come opposite the spot where the unfortunate sailor had lost his life. The big man lurched uncertainly for a moment, and then dropped overboard with a loud splash.

The fighting ceased. The men looked on with amazement. Job Singleton, who had witnessed the incident, ran to the pilot room, and grasping the speaking tube, called down an order to reverse the engines. It was executed with incredible swiftness. The steamer began to back slowly, and the waters were churned into a mass of white vapor. Every eye was on the spot where Rambo had gone down. The moments seemed like minutes, but when the watchers least expected it, a big head was seen to emerge from above the troubled waters.

"Throw him a rope," shouted the mate.

Two sailors responded. In a few seconds the rope was lowered and before the man started to sink for the second time, the bit of hemp struck his bald head. He grabbed it eagerly and held on like grim death.

"Now pull, all together," sang out Singleton.

They pulled; if not with a will, at least with great strength. In less than a minute they had landed him on the deck, a dripping, disconsolate-looking figure. Singleton gazed on the pitiful sight with a grim smile.

"Take him into the cabin," he ordered, with grim humor. "And give him a drink of brandy. We don't want the poor man to catch cold."

As they led the defeated bully away, the mate walked over and clasped the boy by the hand.

"Paul," he said, his mild eyes glowing with pride, "you're the master of this boat, not by inheritance, but by right."

Soon after this Job Singleton disappeared from view for a little while. He put the boy in charge, saying:

"I'll be back to relieve you in ten or fifteen minutes."

Happening to glance through the skylight, Paul saw the big sailor busily engaged in saying the Rosary. Beneath his rough exterior he had the simple faith of a child—the faith that furnishes strength and confidence—the faith which carries the believer through the supreme crises of life.

CHAPTER X

THE "SEA GULL," AFTER A BRAVE ATTEMPT TO
HOLD HER OWN, GOES DOWN TO OBLIVION

THE sky, which had been unclouded, now began to take on a flaky appearance. Job Singleton studied it carefully for some moments, and then, turning to Paul Parker, said:

"We're in for a terrific storm; the signs are in the sky, and they never failed me yet."

Man and boy were outwardly calm after their exciting fight on the deck of the *Sea Gull*, but both were alive to the possibilities of the situation. Bill Rambo they set down as a man of coarse courage, but treacherous to the backbone. He had been treated rather roughly, and was not likely to be over-nice in the methods he used to revenge himself. The sailors were pretty well cowed. The sight of a boy tossing a man overboard had upset their ideas of the fitness of things, and they huddled together in the forecastle discussing the affair with avidity. Except the man at the wheel, Singleton and Paul were the only persons on deck.

The atmosphere was extremely oppressive. The sea was as silent as a pond. Presently there began a light pattering which changed to a drumming roll as great rain-drops began to fall on the deck. The mate, expecting the Captain to return after changing his clothes, had prepared himself for the attack, but the minutes went by and still Rambo did not appear. After a fair interval of time had elapsed, Singleton went to the skylight near the stern of the boat, and lifting it gently, looked down into the cabin. There sat Rambo and Dutton, a bottle of Scotch whisky between them, imbibing freely and swearing vengeance upon their enemies.

A few minutes later, Job Singleton was taken with a sudden and severe rheumatic cramp, and Paul had to assist him to his bunk. The mate assured the boy that he was subject to such attacks, and immediately began to doctor himself with some home-made remedies which he carried in his medicine chest. Paul wanted to remain with him, but he protested that it was not necessary.

As Paul emerged on the forward deck, the rain was coming down in torrents and the wind was whistling fiercely around the red smoke-stack of the *Sea Gull*. Bill Rambo had come aft and was growling at one of the men. He walked with a slight limp, and there was in his

manner and gait a sort of unuttered contempt for his associates. His eager eyes contrasted strangely with the flushed face and the debilitated manner.

The sailor he was addressing made some grumbling reply. The Captain raised his stubby hands and struck the insubordinate one a resounding blow across the face. The man walked away sullenly without a word. When his rage had abated somewhat, Rambo summoned the men amidships. All responded except the engineer and the fireman, who could not leave their posts below. Paul Parker, and Mark Logan, who stood on the extreme left, waited anxiously for the message of the man. It came without any preface.

"Men, this mutiny is at an end. Singleton is down and out, and I'm in command of this ship. I want every one of you to obey me without question. Those that do will be richly rewarded. Those that don't will be sorry till the day they die."

After the men had dispersed, Rambo made frequent trips to the cabin, and after each journey, his face was a trifle more flushed and his utterances a little more husky. Also he was becoming bolder and more defiant. One of the sailors inquired about Job Singleton's condition.

Rambo answered with a savage sneer:

"Oh, he be hanged; he'll be at the bottom of the sea before this trip's over."

"You may be the bait for the fishes yourself!" cried Mark Logan, who happened to be passing and overheard the remark.

"What! preaching to me," sneered the Captain. "I've got a notion to put you in irons again for talking disrespectful to your superior, but not yet awhile. If you don't go along with me, though, you'll get the worst of it."

At this point the man at the wheel had to be relieved. The Captain was not in the mood to do the work himself. He looked about inquiringly. His eye lighted on Paul Parker, standing at the end of the companionway.

"Hey there, Parker," he called, as if he had forgotten all about their fight, "you can manage the wheel, can't you?"

"I don't know," said Paul.

"Well, you're the son of a pilot. I'm sure you can. Take it, anyhow, and steer your course for the Windward Channel."

The youth's worst fears were realized at this order. The man was unfit to command the vessel!

"Job Singleton said to steer toward San Domingo," he remarked suggestively.

"I said the Channel," shouted Rambo, the veins in his short neck swelling ominously.

Paul took the wheel without another word, but there was a peculiar glitter in his big brown eyes. The hurricane had assumed serious proportions and the boat rocked like a cradle. The roar of the ocean drowned out all other sounds, and one particularly large wave dashed over the bow of the *Sea Gull* and broke on the deck, bathing Paul's face in a lather of salt spray. He paid no attention to this, but summoning all of his strength, twisted the wheel around until the nose of the *Sea Gull* was pointed in the direction of the dimly outlined shores of San Domingo.

Presently the sky became overcast; it gradually blackened until the heavens were draped with a sable pall; then came a noise like the muffled sound of countless drums all played in unison and slowly swelling in volume. Scarcely had this strange rumbling ceased when a flash of lightning darted out of the inky sky, making a phosphorescent streak across the black background. In a few minutes the thunder and lightning stopped; but the downpour of rain continued and the velocity of the wind increased.

At this moment Rambo noticed, for the first time, that the steamer was headed for the island. He was amidship, and the shrieking of the wind put ordinary conversation out of the question. The boat was heaving violently

and the Captain sidled over near the pilot house with difficulty. Seizing a megaphone, he pointed it in the direction of the young wheelsman and shouted in hoarse tones:

"Hey there! Look at your chart; you're off your course."

But Paul gritted his teeth and remained silent. He looked straight ahead as impassive as a statue except that there was a strangely humorous droop about the corners of the strong mouth.

Rambo was in a frenzy. His pilot was either stupid or defiant. He shouted again:

"You're on the wrong track; you're headed for the shore. Turn the wheel."

Still provoking silence. The Captain could endure it no longer. He crept over behind the hawser and picked up an iron bar four or five feet long and then stealthily made his way toward the defiant young pilot. Even amid the storm Paul heard the soft footsteps approaching, and turning partly around, caught the murderous look in the man's eye. But he never let go of the wheel. Mark Logan was a witness of the scene. He was filled with horror and hurried forward to defend the intended victim. But help came suddenly from another and an entirely unexpected direction. The *Sea Gull* had been plunging up and down in the vortex of the sea in a way

to bring terror to the boldest heart. As Rambo advanced toward Paul, his face swollen with sodden rage, the bow of the steamer struck a colossal sheet of water which spouted up high in the air—a magnificent, scintillating column of salt spray. The bow of the *Sea Gull* reared itself like a frightened animal, and the stern of the boat sank down deep in the great cavity left by the retreating waters. The unexpected lurch threw the furious man back, his heel struck a stray belaying pin on the deck and he fell head over heels down the companionway of the forecastle.

Paul Parker, clutching the wheel with desperation, watched the performance out of the corner of his eyes. As the head of the murderous Captain disappeared, he heaved a sigh of relief and gave his whole mind to the task of saving the steamer. From that moment the command of the distressed boat fell upon the lusty, strong-limbed young man in the pilot house. The men were in a panic; all thought of the stolen ship and Rambo's mad scheme was dismissed, and their one wish was to reach harbor in safety.

A terrific gust of wind tore away the little wood and glass screen in front of the wheel and left Paul Parker exposed to the fury of the elements. But the boy, bred to danger, never flinched. He lifted his head with a touch of

confidence, and the light falling on his earnest face gave him a look of simple nobility. One of the men, coming close to Paul, shouted that the boat had sprung a leak. The whimsical droop around the corners of Parker's mouth disappeared and was replaced by a hard, set expression. The situation was serious; he realized it fully. The sea had lashed itself into a terrible passion, and it required a giant's strength to hold the wheel. Paul called to Mark Logan to relieve him for a moment while he shouted down the speaking tube to ask if the water had touched the machinery. Fortunately it had not, and the *Sea Gull* puffed and panted and struggled for breath like an obstinate man who has summoned all his strength in a last desperate fight against death.

In spite of the awful strain the steamer gained two knots and lost one. Suddenly it ceased to move. The cause became apparent very quickly. The machinery was still pounding below. A mighty wave had taken away part of the starboard rail clean down to the deck. At the same moment the great anchor just behind the rail slipped out of place and went rattling down into the water amid the clinking of the chains as the windlass went whizzing around with countless mad revolutions. This handicap with the wind and the

turbulent waters held the boat stationary. Mark Logan summoned all hands forward and the dangerous and difficult work of raising the anchor began. The men worked with a will. Finally the great hulk of iron was raised and fastened into place. While the sailors bent over their work, a face, white as chalk, with great bulging eyes, stared out of the cabin port hole. It was Job Singleton, weakened by pain, groaning over his powerless condition.

Just as the anchor was fastened, a mammoth wave, greater than any of its predecessors, swept the forward part of the steamer. By a gigantic effort Paul clung to the wheel; but when the waters passed over and the *Sea Gull* righted herself, it was found that two of the sailors had been thrown into the remorseless sea. Two pairs of hands were lifted appealingly above the boiling waters and then disappeared forever. Fate, in one of its inexorable moods, had selected two of the conspirators for a watery grave. Another wave with the strength of a thousand furies clipped off the top part of the red smokestack. Every separate plank in the steamer groaned at this fresh onslaught—with a groan that was almost human in its intensity, and then the *Sea Gull* shivered and shook from stem to stern.

In the moment of stupefying silence that

followed, the groans of the Captain could be heard from the bottom of the fore-castle, where he had fallen, and where he had lain half stunned by his unexpected drop. During all of the excitement Paul clutched the wheel with an unshakable resolution. His hands were bruised and bleeding; his face was bathed in perspiration and his garments, torn and bedraggled, hung limply about his exhausted form. The men clustered about him waiting orders. He was about to utter some encouraging cry when the engineer, gaining his side, gasped:

“We’ve sprung a fresh leak amidships and the engine room is filling with water!”

Despair settled on the men’s faces; but Paul, looking ahead, saw something that made his eyes dance with joy.

“Bear up, boys; we’re almost in sight of land and a boat is coming this way!”

Sure enough, a sturdy craft, built to bear the buffeting of the sea, was bearing down in the direction of the *Sea Gull*. The waters had subsided somewhat, and the chief of the rescue crew encouraged his men, who sang lustily as they plied the oars. In the meantime the stricken steamer sank inch by inch until the green waters almost touched her deck. Job Singleton was assisted from his berth and all

hands stood in the bow anxiously awaiting the arrival of the rescuers.

They came in the nick of time, and Paul, the first mate, and the rest of the survivors were taken off the battered steamer. As they were pulling away, some one remarked that Bill Rambo was in the hold of the sinking ship. There was silence for a moment, but Paul Parker, realizing the situation, jumped up and insisted upon going back to the wrecked steamer. He quickly clambered over the side of the *Sea Gull*.

"You're mad!" expostulated the mate feebly. "You're likely to go down with the ship!"

Paul made no reply. He only knew he could not go away and leave a living being in that chamber of death. The ship had careened to one end and only the port side was above water. The young pilot was compelled to crawl along the side of the boat on his hands and knees. He reached a window, and creeping in, soon found his way to the fore-castle. Rambo lay there groaning. The young giant, despite his exhaustion, grabbed the fellow and dragged him out of the window and on to the deck. A dozen pairs of hands assisted them into the life-boat. As they seated themselves, the Captain of the life

guard looked first at Paul and then at the prostrate form in the bottom of the boat.

"You've saved his life."

"Yes," interjected the mate, with a queer little laugh; "saved his worthless life for the penitentiary."

A second boat had arrived by this time and after some confusion, the human cargo was divided between the two crafts; the first one with the Captain, Eli Dutton, and three of Rambo's men started for the shore at once. The waters were quite calm now and they progressed rapidly. The second one, with Paul, Singleton and the others, waited the end of the *Sea Gull*. The big boat, which had been gradually sinking, now gave a queer sound—like a gulp of sorrow. The eyes of every one in the small boat were fixed upon the wreck of the tramp steamer. The decks went beneath the waters. Some freak of the wind caused the whistle valve to give an expiring shriek; and then the broken end of the red smokestack disappeared. The horizon was clear—all that remained on the surface of the sea was a great cluster of sparkling bubbles, which separated into little particles until they finally reformed into a vapory wreath over the watery grave of the *Sea Gull*.

CHAPTER XI

MARK LOGAN, ON REACHING DRY LAND, GETS A
TASTE OF THE "LAW OF THE SEA"

THE storm had abated, but the waters were still rough. As the *Sea Gull* went down Paul Parker turned to the man in the bow of the small boat and gave the order to pull for the shore. It was misty, but in the distance could be discerned the shores of Monte Cristo, the picturesque town on the coast of San Domingo. The men rowed with a will, but their progress was painfully slow. The boat was overweighted and the tide was beginning to come against them. Rambo, Dutton and the others, who had gone in the first boat, were not so heavily handicapped. Also their early start was an advantage. By pushing ahead before the turn in the tide they were now almost in sight of the shore. Paul lifted his glasses and saw Bill Rambo standing up in the boat directing the movements of the oarsmen. Mark Logan crouched in the corner of the craft, evidently none too well pleased at the thought of being compelled to associate with Rambo.

Paul handed the glasses to Singleton and the mate focused them on the other boat.

"They're straining every nerve to reach the shore," he said. "Rambo's making himself very officious. I wonder why he's so anxious to get there ahead of us."

"Probably he don't like our company," laughed Paul.

Whatever the reason, Rambo and his party reached shore half an hour before Paul Parker and the other survivors. When the second boat beached, a sailor came running down to meet it. He touched his cap to Job Singleton respectfully and exclaimed:

"I'm sorry you were not on hand a little sooner, sir!"

"Why?"

"Nothing, except that that Rambo is up to his little tricks again."

"Be plain," cried the mate irritably; "what's happened?"

"Well, sir," responded the man, "it's got me so upset that I can't make out what's what. However, I'll try to be as clear as possible. As soon as we reaches shore, he tells us all to follow him. We did so and he takes us to the office of the British Consul, up there at the top of the hill. The minute he gets inside, two of his men grabs Mark Logan and holds him until the Consul came in. Then Rambo turns

to him with a great bowing and scraping and says:

"Your honor, I beg leave to introduce myself as Captain of the *Sea Gull*, as brave a ship as ever flew the British flag, sir, which has just gone down to a watery grave!"

"And the villain," continued the narrator, "has the nerve to wipe a tear from his eye. The Consul is interested, and asks to have the particulars. He gives 'em a cock and bull story, all the time watching the shore for fear you would get there before he finished his dirty business. After he tells his beautiful story, he snivels a bit and adds:

"'But your honor, that's not all. To add to our troubles, we've had a mutiny aboard. This man, Mark Logan, tried to kill me and I want you to hold him under arrest.'"

"You could have knocked me down with a feather," said the sailor. "Logan is about to deny the charge, but this lobster of a Consul shuts him up and tells Rambo to go ahead with his story. He tells a pretty one, I assure you. Says Logan threw him down the stairway into the forecastle and a lot of stuff like that. Then the Consul asks if he has his ship's papers, and he shows him a complete set made out in the name of the *Sea Gull*. It was as neat a job as ever you saw in all your born days. Finally he is asked if he has anyone

to prove his charges, and Eli Dutton and two of the sailors steps up and commits as lovely a case of perjury as ever I listened to. My, it was something magnificent to behold. I tries to open my jaws, but they shuts me up in double quick order and I has to run away to escape violence."

Singleton and the boy looked at one another several times during this recital. At the conclusion, the mate said:

"Paul, if we're going to save the poor man, we've got to make tracks."

"Right you are, Mr. Singleton; we'll go at once."

They started up the hill toward the street, which was built on the embankment fronting the ocean. As they jogged along with the sailor, they had an opportunity for a hasty survey of the city. The immediate neighborhood appeared to be sparsely settled, but there were numerous dwellings further in the town. Most of them were wood and all had a white shell-like roof which glistened every time it came in contact with the uncertain rays of the sun. The sight of a British flag floating on the top of a frame cottage warned them that they were in the vicinity of the Consulate. They entered a plainly furnished room. In the center was a large desk. A blonde youth, perched on a high stool, was engaged in writ-

ing. He continued his work and did not even lift his eyes.

Job Singleton gave a loud cough and Paul stamped on the floor with his right boot. Still the representative of His Majesty continued to scrape his pen across the paper. The mate could stand it no longer. He approached the desk and raised his voice.

"I would like to talk to you, sir, on important business."

"Would you?" asked the youth, pausing in his work and pulling hard at the small end of a rather sickly looking mustache.

"Yes, I would!" shouted the mate, angry now, "and mighty quick too."

"Well, why don't you?"

"You're a fine Consul—"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted the youth.

"What for?"

"I'm not the Consul."

"Well, who are—"

"I'm the Consul's clerk."

"Do you represent him officially?"

"I do."

"Well, I'm here to see about a poor seaman, named Mark Logan. A rascal called Bill Rambo's been swearing Logan's life away. I'm here to prove that it's all perjury and that Logan's innocent. Now can't you take our depositions and release the poor fellow?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't," answered the clerk with an indulgent smile.

"Why not?"

"Because it's too late."

"In what way?"

"I guess I'll have to give you all the details," yawned the weary one. "It was this way. The jail's crowded here and the Consul made an arrangement by which all of the British prisoners should be taken to the jail at Jamaica. All the details and the prisoners were ready to start off to-day when your mutinous friend was brought in—"

"He was not mutinous!" cried Paul.

"Well, that's neither here nor there. On the surface he was guilty of mutiny. The evidence was against him, so the Consul packed him off with the other prisoners and he is now on his way to Jamaica."

"But I can appeal from the decision of the Consul?" ventured Job Singleton.

"Certainly."

"Well, then I do. Kindly let me know when I can meet the Consul to-day."

"You won't meet the Consul to-day."

"Why not?"

"He left town."

"I'll see him in the morning."

The clerk shook his head; then, with another tremendous yawn, replied:

"He's got a fortnight's leave of absence and he's gone to Jamaica to visit some friends."

The mate and the boy reluctantly left the office. The moment Singleton reached the open air he remembered the other members of the crew.

"We're forgetting our manners," he said to Paul. "I never even thanked the brave fellows that brought us ashore."

On the beach stood the uniformed officer who had commanded the first life-saving boat. Job saluted him and said:

"Whom are we to thank?"

"My name is Moore," said the officer; "boatswain of the *Perry*, now in the harbor ready to sail for the United States."

The mate looked out in the stream and noticed for the first time a beautiful vessel all prepared to sail away.

"I owe you an apology, boatswain," said Singleton, "but I was so excited over one of our men that I clean forgot to tell you how grateful we all feel for pulling us off the wreck."

"Don't mention it," was the genial reply. "It's all in the day's work. We pulled in near the shore in time to avoid most of the storm. I'm glad we were of some service to you."

"Some service," grinned the mate; "you saved our blooming lives."

"Well," laughed the boatswain, "put it that way if you like. Now what I want to know is whether any of your men want to go back to the United States. If so, let 'em jump in these life-boats and we'll put 'em aboard the *Perry* and take 'em to the land of the Star Spangled Banner."

"What do you say, men?" asked Singleton, turning to the assembled crew.

"We say yes," cried Mike Moran, the cook, answering for the others.

Without more ado they climbed into the boats, leaving Job and Paul on the shore.

"What about you two?" asked the boatswain.

"Oh," smiled Job, "we're going to stay. We have important business here."

"That's all, is it, then?" asked the officer.

"Yes," answered the sailor. "All except a ruffian named Rambo and his pal named Dutton and a poor fellow named Logan that they've sworn into jail."

A minute later and the crew of the wrecked vessel were being rowed toward the *Perry*. Job and Paul waved their final farewells and walked slowly toward the town.

"I don't suppose," said the mate reflectively, "that there would be any use in following that prison van that carried Logan off."

"Not the slightest," answered Paul. "It's

got at least an hour's start of us. Besides, it's hitched to a pair of swift horses, while we're afoot. In any event, we couldn't attempt to overcome the guard. We've got to resign ourselves to the fact that Mark Logan is going into a British prison. We must get to Jamaica."

The mate filled his pipe, and putting the short stem in his mouth, sucked away in silence. He looked at Paul curiously. Presently he spoke.

"Are you discouraged, youngster?"

"Not while you are with me," cried Paul, jumping up and putting his hand on the big fellow's shoulder.

"I thought not," said Singleton, with a pleased smile. "Fortune seems to have thrown us together, and that being the case, I think you'd better make a clean breast of your mission."

"You suspect what it is?" suggested Paul.

"Yes," replied the mate, "and with what I've picked up here and there I can piece out a very likely story, but if I'm going into this thing, I don't want hearsay; I want to know the facts."

"You're perfectly right," said the boy, "and Uncle provided for just such an emergency as this by giving me the right to tell the whole story."

Briefly and simply he gave the narrative of the golden chest as it had been told to him by the dying sea captain. Job Singleton was intensely interested and his eyes sparkled, and a sense of elation thrilled his whole body. As Paul concluded, he said:

"Of course, I knew that the letter of authority presented by Bill Rambo belonged to you, and that you were the real master of the *Water Witch*, but he had the documents in the case and I was helpless."

"I know that very well," said Paul, "and I wouldn't want you to think for a minute that I questioned your action. It was impossible for you to do anything else. But now that you know the whole story from beginning to end, will you help me to recover that chest?"

The mate looked at Paul steadily for some moments. Just when the long-continued stare was becoming embarrassing, he poked out his big hand and said:

"There's my answer, boy."

"Thank you, Mr. Singleton," exclaimed Paul; "I was sure you'd stick by me."

"That fellow got away with your letter in slick style," said the mate, ignoring the personal reference. "The question now is whether you've got the key of your chest all safe and sound."

"Oh, yes," said Paul; "it's around my neck

now. I've never taken it off since Uncle put it there."

"How do you know the key's there?"

"I can feel it," said Paul, pressing a little substance beneath his shirt with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand.

"Let's have a look at it," persisted the mate.

Paul responded at once. He lifted the string over his head and taking hold of the chamois bag, opened the top portion. He put in his hand and drew out a long rusty nail.

The boy gasped for breath. The man smiled ironically.

"He's beaten you again, but it's all the better. You're stripped bare, without a single advantage. You haven't got a shoe-string to start with. We'll win at that! We will, so sure as my name is Job Singleton."

CHAPTER XII

AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY CAUSES PAUL AND THE MATE TO CHANGE THEIR PLANS

IT was almost dusk, and the prospect, in a new country, was far from encouraging. Singleton and Paul sat down by the roadside to talk over the situation. Suddenly the mate arose and put his hand in his pocket.

"I almost forgot about this," he exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked Paul.

"My purse. We're not as bad off as you think. I've got forty or fifty dollars here."

The boy smiled as the man exhibited a wallet fat with silver and gold.

"As for that," he answered, "I'm not stripped bare. I've got several hundred dollars in my clothes. Aunt Susan would not let me go away penniless."

Singleton waved his hat in the air.

"Hurrah! We're two American millionaires traveling on the island for our health."

Paul smiled at this enthusiasm.

"Hardly that," he answered, "but they can't pick us up for two tramps."

The mate paced up and down the road for

a few minutes. He moved with agility. He had recovered entirely from the sickness which attacked him on seaboard, and now looked fit for any enterprise. He spoke quietly, more to himself than to the boy.

"I'd like to know something about the island."

"Here's a native coming up the hill," said Paul; "maybe he can enlighten you."

Singleton hailed the man. He crossed the road and joined them.

"They're mostly French here," observed the mate. "I wonder if this chap can talk English."

"Certainly," responded the colored man, speaking for himself in a clear, distinct voice.

The two strangers shouted with joy.

"My friend," said Singleton, "we're two shipwrecked sailors. Our destination is Jamaica. We'd like to know when we are likely to get a boat for that place."

The man raised his eyebrows in astonishment, he spoke with a gentle voice.

"Never—from here."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing, except that this port has been practically abandoned. Occasionally you get a boat going around the island and sometimes one headed for the United States, but rarely one bound for Jamaica."

"Well, how do you get to Jamaica?"

"We go from the other side of the island."

"Oh, I see," said Singleton. "Now if we go across the island, what seaport are we likely to strike on the other side?"

"Port au Prince."

"But that's Hayti."

"Yes."

"Well, we don't want to get into that country. We might get mixed up in one of the revolutions."

"Why not?" smiled the native.

"Simply lack of time," laughed the mate.

Presently the man reached in his pocket and pulled out a little map.

"Maybe this will help you."

Singleton seized it eagerly. He looked it over carefully. He turned to the man.

"Will you sell this map, my friend?"

"Oh," was the careless reply, "it's not worth anything; you may have it."

But the sailor insisted upon pressing a silver coin in the man's hand.

"The point we want to make," he said finally, "is the city of San Domingo. Can we get a boat from there to Jamaica?"

"Sure. There are two a week sailing at this time of the year."

"Good. Now, I suppose that there's some

kind of a railroad to take us to San Domingo."

"There was," smiled the native, "but the last hurricane cleaned up everything on the island."

"How will we get there then?"

"Hoof it," interjected Paul, cheerfully.

"You can do better than that."

"How?"

"Buy a couple of donkeys; you can sell 'em at the other end."

"Are they all right?"

"Nothing better. They're slow but sure."

"What do you say, Paul?" asked the sailor.

"It's the only way we can work it."

"It seems so."

"I'm for it."

"So am I," assented Singleton.

"The country is very wild," suggested the colored man.

"So much the better," exclaimed Paul.

"It's very lonely in spots."

"I never was much for company," commented the sailor.

"If you want a guide," said the man, "I'm at your service."

"Is that a hotel up there?" asked the mate, pointing to a frame building overlooking the bay.

“Yes.”

“Well, we’re going to spend the night there. You come and see us the first thing in the morning and we’ll talk over the guide proposition.”

With that they parted. The native went his way, while Singleton and Paul walked toward the Monte Cristo hotel. They found mud, narrow streets, black faces, and other tropical surroundings that made them feel that they were indeed in a new world. The cabins on the outskirts of the town bespoke poverty. The hotel suggested genteel affluence. And yet it was only two and a half stories high and built of wood. A covered porch extended from the second story front room, and here at night the guests adjourned to smoke fat, black, after-dinner cigars.

The landlord, a white man, was lolling at the front door. He looked up drowsily, as if the presence of strangers bored him. Singleton spoke in quick, crisp tones:

“We’re strangers here. We want supper, lodging and breakfast, and we’d also like to buy a couple of donkeys.”

At the mention of the last word, the landlord pricked up his ears sympathetically.

“I just think I can accommodate you,” he drawled. “I’ve got two of the friskiest beasts that ever rolled in the dust.”

They followed him to a barn. Two donkeys were in the stalls, munching away at a pile of hay with tropical slowness. The owner talked learnedly about their good traits, while the two sailors listened with the blissfulness which comes only with complete ignorance.

"Where did they come from?" asked Paul, feeling it was time to ask some sort of question.

"From my guests," replied the landlord proudly.

"From your guests?"

"Yes; you see it was this way. About two months ago, two traders came here on these donkeys. They liked my place so well that they stayed longer than they intended. Presently all of their money was gone. I gave them a gentle hint that it was time to leave. One of them wanted to know if I wouldn't take the donkeys in exchange for board. I was agreeable, so they stayed until they had eaten up the two donkeys."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Singleton, "that was a good joke."

"So I thought until they left," said the landlord. "I found that although my boarders were gone, the donkeys were still here."

"What of that?"

"What of that? Why, the donkeys have been eating ever since. They've eaten an ad-

dition off my house, and if I don't get rid of them, they'll eat up the hotel."

"In that case," said Singleton shrewdly, "you will probably be glad to get rid of them cheap."

"Not too cheap," cried the landlord; "you see it's a matter of pride with me."

Neither Singleton nor Paul could see where the pride came in, but they did not deem it desirable to press that phase of the subject. After much quibbling, the landlord offered to sell the donkeys for what was the equivalent of forty American dollars. The travelers accepted the offer at once, and to make sure of the animals paid the money immediately. The landlord was delighted. Donkeys he could get at any time, but dollars rarely found their way into his capacious pockets.

The two beasts were as much alike as two peas in a pod. They had long ears, small feet, thick coats of hair and the most appealing eyes that were ever put in donkeys' heads. In color they were a dirty brown and the only trait by which they could be distinguished apart was the fact that one had a whitish streak across its shoulder, while the other was perfectly uniform in color. The manes of each of the animals, as stiff as the hair on a scrubbing brush, came to sharp points near the tops of the heads. After they had made a complete survey of

their purchase, the landlord, in an outburst of enthusiasm, invited them to take dinner at his expense.

The meal was spread in the public room of the inn. The plain deal table was innocent of cloth, but a detail of that sort made little difference to a man and a boy who were accustomed to roughing it on the sea. They were a bit curious, however, concerning the character of their first meal on Dominican soil. The landlord made several hurried visits to the kitchen, and in the intervals sat at the table and chatted with them concerning their prospective journey to the other side of the island. In the course of the conversation it became known that they were from the United States. The landlord betrayed immediate interest.

"I'm glad to know it," he said. "I like to meet Americans. They are so quick and they spend money. I had two of them here to-day."

Instantly Singleton was attentive.

"What did they look like?"

"One had a big body and short legs," answered the landlord. "His face was very red and he swore like a pirate."

"Bill Rambo!" exclaimed Paul.

"And the other," continued the host, "had a hard-looking face and wore shabby clothes.

He was very attentive to the first man and obeyed all that he said."

"Eli Dutton," commented Singleton.

"Did they say they were coming back or did they go on?" asked Paul.

"They didn't make it very clear," responded the landlord. "The red-faced man seemed to be in a good humor. I think they'll come back."

The aroma of boiling coffee from the next room suggested that dinner was served. Singleton and Paul pulled their chairs up to the table and, not being in a critical mood, ate heartily of all that was set before them. Variety and quantity seemed to be the watchwords of that inn. Besides the coffee, and some native flapjacks which were cooked in ashes, the sailor and his companion had rice, sardines, pickled salmon, canned tomatoes, stale bread, peas, claret and vermicelli. After dinner they went upstairs and were given easy chairs on the balcony. The mate tried one of the heavy black cigars, while Paul, to be companionable, attempted to smoke a native cigarette, but his honest stomach forced him to cast it aside after a few puffs.

It was a perfect night. The air was still, while the stars shone from the blue-vaulted heavens with a tropical brilliancy. How long they sat there in silence they knew not. It must have been hours. Singleton was dozing

gently when Paul's attention was attracted by the sounds of revelry in the room behind the porch. He tiptoed over to the doorway, and parting the curtains looked in. Two men were seated at a table drinking Jamaica rum. Their backs were turned to him, but presently one of the men turned and almost caused the boy to shout with surprise.

It was Bill Rambo!

Another shifting of positions revealed his companion as Eli Dutton. Paul quickly aroused Job Singleton and by a series of pantomime gestures made him aware of the proximity of their two enemies.

"What shall we do?" whispered Paul.

"Lay low and say nothing for the present," answered the mate.

They remained on the porch for an hour. During that time Rambo and Dutton continued to sample the native rum. Rambo, becoming confidential, began to tell his troubles to Dutton. His tones were thick, but it was all one to his companion, who was in a semi-stupefied condition. The erstwhile Captain of the *Sea Gull* talked on and on and presently, putting his hand in his pocket, pulled out a bit of string from which was suspended a key.

Paul, with his eye between the curtains, jumped to his feet excitedly.

It was the key of the treasure chest!

Rambo held it up in mid-air and continued to talk incoherently to his companion. After awhile he stuck it in his coat pocket clumsily, a portion of the string hanging out. He gave a bleary glance at Dutton, and with a silly smile, intended as the personification of wisdom, muttered:

“The man’s asleep.”

With that sage observation, he, himself, went to sleep and was lost to consciousness.

Singleton and Paul waited until they were assured that both men were insensible, and then crept silently into the room. Paul tiptoed over to Rambo’s side and, taking hold of the suspended string, gently pulled the key out of his pocket. After that they went down the creaking stairs in their stocking feet. No one was about. The door of the inn was closed but not locked. Such a precaution was regarded as superfluous in that country. The two adventurers made their way stealthily to the stables. The two donkeys were there, still munching away at the hay. As the sailors approached, they set up a braying loud enough to wake the dead. Fortunately, the sound was too familiar to disturb any one in the inn.

Paul and Job each led an animal out into the roadside. It took but a few minutes to adjust

the curious saddles of straw and palm leaf. As they concluded, a clock in the inn struck the hour of midnight. The man and the boy each mounted his beast and departed, and in a few minutes they were swallowed up in the darkness.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ADVENTURERS HAVE A CURIOUS NIGHT IN THE WOODS OF SAN DOMINGO

SHORTLY after Job Singleton and Paul Parker started on their journey, the black clouds passed away and the stars shone down brightly upon them. The roads were bad and the donkeys stumbled a great deal, but after jogging along for about an hour they reached an immense open plain which was crossed and recrossed with good hard roads. Near the end of one of these roads they came to a coffee plantation which, to all intents and purposes, was open to the public. Job and Paul assumed that it was, at any rate, for they continued on their way without a pause. The road led them through long avenues of graceful palms which, in the moonlight, resembled the marble columns of some magnificent palace. After leaving the coffee estate, the road narrowed so that at some points it was impossible for the two to go abreast. Each of the riders cried simultaneously:

“You go first.”

Both spurred their animals on, but the donkeys stood stock still and could not be induced to move one inch. Paul burst out laughing.

"Mr. Singleton, I've been wondering what to call my donkey; I've got it now."

"What is it?"

"Alphonse."

"And what will mine be?"

"Why, Gaston, of course."

The sailor, who had never heard of the two polite Frenchmen of the comic supplements, each of whom perpetually insisted upon the other going first, scratched his head in a puzzled fashion, and said he supposed these names would satisfy the donkeys as well as any other.

A few lumps of sugar skillfully administered induced Alphonse to go ahead, and Gaston immediately followed. The road for the next few miles was through enormous clumps of cactus, the great prickly plant which is so abundant in the tropics. Cotton trees and flowering aloes bordered the hedges. A wild hog or a goat occasionally flitted across the road, but except for these interruptions, the night was very still. Indeed there was something oppressive about this solemn quiet. At one stage of the journey the travelers came across a cemetery. The tall monuments, crowned by wooden crosses, threw a ghostly shadow over the road and induced a feeling of

reverence which caused the sailors, involuntarily, to take off their hats.

During the journey, Paul and Job kept up a running conversation. In this way, and with the changing scenes, the time passed very rapidly. Presently Singleton pulled out his big old-fashioned silver watch.

"Five o'clock."

"I thought so," replied Paul; "I've felt that day was breaking for the last half hour."

"We seem to be approaching a city," said the mate.

Paul consulted his pocket map.

"It must be Santiago."

From time to time now they met other travelers; most of them had horses or mules laden down with tobacco, and all were proceeding in the direction of the city. In a little while the road became a street and the two strangers found themselves in the heart of the city. It was far from imposing. Most of the dwellings were huts. Some of the larger houses looked as if they had been destroyed by a cyclone or an earthquake. Whatever the cause, no attempt had been made to rebuild. The market square presented a picturesque sight; sleeping donkeys, ruined walls, and grass-grown streets did not speak well for the progressive spirit of Santiago.

They pushed on a little further and going

to the left discovered themselves on the edge of a great high bluff. Far beneath them, running its active but tranquil course, was the river Yaqui, the clearness of its waters reflecting like a mirror. At this stage of the game, both Alphonse and Gaston began to betray symptoms of extreme weariness. Paul looked over at Singleton, whose long legs almost touched the ground. The boy laughed.

"It looks as if we'd have to dismount."

"It does indeed," agreed the mate, "and I'll be thankful if we're not compelled to carry these donkeys to the nearest inn and put them to bed."

"It's not that bad, I hope. But where shall we go?"

"Well," said the mate, "as we went through the market place, I noticed a weather-beaten shingle hanging out of a two-story house."

"Was it a hotel?"

"I'm not sure. But it had some funny French lettering on it and I imagined it said 'Accommodations for man and beast.'"

"We'll try it," said Paul.

Both dismounted slowly and led the donkeys back to the house with the weather-beaten shingle. The mate's guess was correct. It was an inn, and the landlord, after a great rubbing of eyes, and running of fingers between rumpled hair, expressed a willingness

to accommodate not only the man and the boy, but Alphonse and Gaston as well.

"Do you think it's safe to stop here?" asked Paul, turning to Job Singleton.

"Why not?"

"Rambo," was the terse response.

"Oh, we've got too good a start on him. He's probably asleep yet. Besides, the donkeys won't go any further and we've got to take a chance."

This logic was too convincing to admit of any reply, and in a few minutes the travelers were leading the donkeys into a stable in the rear of the house, where Alphonse and Gaston were given food and drink and all of the other creature comforts of good donkeys.

Job and Paul partook of a hastily prepared breakfast and were then escorted to their room, which was a large bare apartment containing two cots. After warning the landlord not to let them sleep later than twelve o'clock under any circumstances, they threw their tired bodies on the mattresses and in a few minutes their heavy breathing announced that they were deep in the luxury of dreamless slumber.

The landlord, with tropical nonchalance, forgot all about his guests, and going to a hammock in the rear of the house calmly climbed in and was soon lost in peaceful sleep. It was long past the noon hour when the warm

rays of the sun awakened the travelers. Job Singleton was the first to leap out of bed. He reached for his clothing, and seizing his watch looked at it with drowsy eyes.

"Paul," he shouted, "it's after one o'clock. We must be up and going."

The boy responded immediately and in a few minutes they were dressed and down-stairs. They looked for the landlord, but could find no trace of him. That functionary, with a handkerchief thrown over his face, was still indulging in nature's greatest refreshment. Singleton became irritated. He pounded on the desk with his brawny fist. No response. He repeated the performance. At this, a door in the side of the corridor opened and out walked the queerest specimen of humanity he had seen in many a long day.

It was a colored native. He was black as anthracite coal and barefooted. As if to compensate for this, he wore a high cassimere hat, beneath which two or three large cabbage leaves, covering his head, served to protect him from the rays of the noon-day sun. He had on a calico shirt, a large navy blue cloak, very faded and very ragged, short trousers, patched in front and back, and carried a large green umbrella. To complete the picture, he puffed away at a big cigar, several inches in diameter, and blacker than his own dusky face.

The moment he beheld Job and Paul, he poked the umbrella under his arm, took off his high hat, and gave them a profound bow.

"I want the landlord!" shouted the mate.

The picturesque intruder bowed again.

"I represent the landlord."

"Who are you?"

"I'm Jonah."

"Jonah?"

"Yes, sir, Jonah."

"Jonah what?"

"Oh," with an engaging smile, "I never bother with the rest of it. Just plain Jonah."

"Why do they call you Jonah?" asked the mate, his severity relaxing a bit.

"Don't know," answered the picturesque one, his smile growing broader, "'less it's cause I'm such good luck."

"What's your business?"

"I'm a guide."

Singleton turned to Paul.

"This is probably just the fellow we need."

"He could start us on the right road, anyhow," assented the boy.

The guide bowed again.

"Where do you want to go?"

"We're bound for San Domingo City."

The colored gentleman removed one of the cabbage leaves in order to give his head a thoughtful scratch.

"I don't hardly think I could give you so much time."

"But—" began Singleton.

The guide raised his hands for silence.

"It would take several days, you know, and my engagements—"

The mate interrupted this time.

"We don't want you to go to San Domingo. We only want to get started right."

He was about to lower his head again when the sailor checked him.

"Stop bowing and talk."

He did stop bowing, but he did not talk. Instead he waited for the question that was coming.

"What is the next town to this?"

"On the way to San Domingo?"

"Yes."

"Mocha."

"Can we make it by to-night?"

"Yes; if you start now and travel fast."

"Good! Now if you'll get us a bite to eat and start us off on the way to Mocha, I'll give you some American silver."

No further suggestion was necessary. Jonah tossed aside his umbrella and his high hat and got to work. In a few minutes, with the assistance of the kitchen girl, he prepared a satisfactory lunch. Job and Paul started in at once, after sending Jonah to the

stable to prepare the donkeys for the journey. While they were at the table, the landlord, having finished his nap, came in and apologized profusely for his remissness.

The offense was too ludicrous for censure, so they simply paid the score and went on with their meal. Concluding first, Paul went out on the veranda to take a look about the public square. It was inactive. A few women here and there with vegetables, were bargaining with prospective customers, but, being the heated time of day, most of the venders were quietly dozing under big umbrellas. Two roads, leading to the town, stretched out like great bands of yellow ribbons. Suddenly on the first road, far away in the direction of Monte Cristo, Paul noticed a tiny cloud of dust. Very slowly but very surely it came nearer.

It was too far away to be discerned very clearly by the naked eye. Paul borrowed a telescope from the landlord and leveled it at the cloud of dust. Presently, out of the confusion, there emerged a horse and carriage. In a few minutes the boy could distinguish the figures of two men. The sight disturbed him very much. He rushed in to Job Singleton.

"Here," he shouted, "take a look at that carriage and let me know what you make of it."

The mate did as he was requested. He looked earnestly in the direction indicated. For a time he seemed puzzled. After that his face hardened. Finally he exclaimed:

"Paul, I know what you're thinking and you're right."

"You mean—?"

"Yes, I mean that Bill Rambo and Eli Dutton are in that carriage."

The boy's face darkened. He set his lips firmly. He looked up at his big companion.

"I suppose we've got to have it out with that rascal. Well, I'm prepared to do my part."

Singleton smiled.

"Yes, we've got to have it out with him; but I don't know whether this is the time and place for the performance."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that strategy is sometimes more certain and usually more profitable than force."

"I'm still in the dark," insisted Paul.

"My own mind's not entirely clear," laughed the long-limbed fellow, "but my idea is to dodge these rascals, if possible. We've got the key—that's nine points of the situation. Now if we can keep it without fighting for it, so much the better. If it's necessary to fight, I'll be there."

The boy knew that these were not idle words. He looked up at the big sailor admiringly.

"What do you propose?"

Singleton glanced about inquiringly. His eyes fell on Jonah standing in the hallway. He called him and diving into his pockets, put a handful of silver coin in the open palm of the guide. The smile that greeted this performance made Jonah's mouth stretch from ear to ear.

"Jonah," said Singleton, "you say you're good luck."

"You can just bet I am, boss."

"Well, do you see that carriage coming in this direction?"

"Yes, sir."

"You see the two men in it?"

"I do."

"Well," said the sailor, "I think they're coming here. They're very anxious to meet us; we're very anxious *not* to meet them. If you can prevent the meeting, I'll give you another handful of silver. Do you understand?"

"You can just bet I do, boss," smiled the colored man.

"Now we've time to get to our room. Shut the stable door and don't let them see our donkeys. That might make 'em suspicious. I leave the whole thing to you."

"Thank you, boss," said Jonah with a grateful grin.

The dusky guide and counselor of Santiago had just time to close the barn door and take his place on the veranda when the team drove up to the doorway. The horse was in a lather from the unwonted exertion. As it stopped, the red face of Bill Rambo peered from beneath the curtains and the lines were thrown over the horse's back.

"What are you going to do?" growled a voice—the voice of Eli Dutton.

"I'm going to get a good drink first of all. After that we'll get some grub."

"Do you think the kid's here?"

The men dropped their voices at this stage of the conversation, so that Jonah heard no more. He was on the alert, however, and as Bill Rambo put one short leg on the hub of the front wheel to alight, the colored man was at his side with a bottle of whisky and a glass. The red-faced man settled back in his seat again with a grunt of satisfaction and grabbed eagerly for the spirits.

"Well, this is hospitality. Couldn't beat this in Kentucky."

After the first drink he took a second. As he drained the glass, he handed it grudgingly to the second mate, who took about three fingers of the whisky.

"How much does that cost?" asked Rambo suspiciously.

"Oh, anything you want to give," said Jonah carelessly.

Rambo handed him the smallest coin in his pocket, which immediately gave the black guide and counselor a key to the man's nature. Dutton whispered with him for a moment and then the erstwhile Captain spoke.

"Can we get accommodations in this hotel?"

"Sure, boss; the best on the island."

Jonah's mind was working actively now. He wanted to lull the men into a sense of security, yet wondered how far he could go into the game without betraying his liberal friends within the inn.

"We're after a couple of runaways," blurted Rambo.

Jonah saw his opportunity, and he grasped it with a quickness and a cleverness that would have done credit to a brighter and brainier man. He spoke eagerly.

"Was one of 'em a big, long-legged man?"

"Yes," answered Rambo with equal eagerness.

"And the other a boy with a smart face?"

"Yes! yes!" cried Rambo.

"And was they traveling on two donkeys?"

"Oh, yes!" shouted the red-faced one, "what

can you tell us about them? Were they here?"

"Yes indeedy," answered the colored man, as if it gave him joy to relate the fact.

"Are they here now?"

"No indeedy," replied Jonah, never turning a hair. "They left here just half an hour ago."

Rambo was twitching with excitement.

"Where did they go?" he shouted, standing up in the carriage.

"They went down that first road to the right," said the informant gravely, "and they certainly was in a mighty big hurry."

"The road to the right; the road to the right," repeated Rambo nervously; "where does that lead to?"

"To the coast of Hayti."

"Are you sure they went in that direction?"

"Sure, boss, I seed them go myself."

"We'd better follow 'em," said Rambo, turning to Dutton.

"Certainly," answered that worthy; "it's the only thing to do."

Both men settled back in their seats and gave the horse the rein. The colored man ran after the carriage a few paces.

"You forgot something, boss," he grinned. The driver pulled up suddenly.

"What is it?"

"You forgot to pay me for my news."

"Oh, you go to thunder!" shouted the red-faced one, starting off again.

Jonah chuckled as he made his way back to the inn. Before going to inform the fugitives of their safety, he paused for a moment on the porch, and, turning his head, caught a last glimpse of the carriage, as Rambo, whipping up the horse, hurried post-haste in the direction of the Haytian coast.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRAVELERS MEET AND OVERCOME SEVERAL OBSTACLES ON THE WAY TO MOCHA

BEFORE Rambo was out of sight, Jonah was upstairs entertaining Job and Paul with a vivid recital of how he had deceived the one-time Captain of the *Sea Gull*. They smiled as they thought of the predicament in which the bombastic one would shortly find himself. The mate, in a spirit of fun, turned toward the colored man.

"Prevarication is a terrible thing."

"It sounds awful," replied Jonah.

"Of course you know what it means?"

"I never heard of it before."

"Don't plague the man," remonstrated Paul. "If he's done anything wrong, we're responsible."

"I ain't done nothing wrong," asserted Jonah, with a confident shake of the head.

Singleton patted him on the back with the palm of his right hand.

"If you never do anything worse than to

frustrate the evil schemes of men like Bill Rambo, your chances of Paradise are very good indeed."

"There you go again," cried Jonah. "Fust it's prevarication; now it's Paradise; I certainly don't understand that kind of language."

Job and Paul laughed heartily at the drollness of the old daky. The mate, putting his hand in his pocket, pulled out a fresh handful of silver which he transferred to Jonah's willing palm.

"There, now," he exclaimed, "I'll bet you understand that kind of language."

"Oh, boss!" cried Jonah, "you're certainly too good to me. I'll sure stick by you through all of your troubles."

"Do we want him to stick by us?" asked Paul, dubiously.

"That's the question," replied the mate perplexedly. "If we take him it may be adding a fresh trouble to our old troubles."

"Oh, 'deed it won't, boss! 'deed it won't!" said Jonah. "Let me go as far as Mocha with you anyhow. After that, if I don't suit, you can send me home."

"Why, Jonah," cried Paul, "you talk as if you really want to go with us."

"I do," was the emphatic response.

"But when you first met us you said you

didn't know whether you could go as far as Mocha."

"That's true, boss; but I didn't know you then."

"Well," said the mate, "there's no use wasting a lot of time in talk. There seems to be some doubt whether Jonah's going along with us. We'll settle it by a toss of the coin. Heads he goes; tails he stays at home."

As he spoke, Singleton flipped a silver dollar in the air. Jonah watched expectantly for the result. Paul and Singleton, while betraying no outward interest, were just as eager. The coin rolled on the floor for a few feet and then dropped flat. Three pairs of eyes scanned its surface. They were greeted by the sight of the familiar head of the Goddess of Liberty.

"Hurrah!" shouted Job and Paul in chorus; "you win."

That ear-to-ear grin appeared on the colored man's face.

"Well, boss number one and boss number two," he said, nodding in turn to Singleton and the boy, "you won't ever live to regret taking me."

Without further ado, the three began preparations for their departure. Alphonse and Gaston were brought from the stable, still munching hay, and saddled for the journey.

There was some question of providing a conveyance for Jonah, but that individual said that such a proceeding was unheard-of and would be a reflection upon his fleet-footedness. So they started off, a contented and congenial trio. For many miles the road lay through a rich agricultural country—rich, however, only in possibilities, for most of the land was untilled. It was a bright day, and the breezes from the ocean were wafted across the island and made the blood tingle in the veins of the two wandering Yankees.

They passed through a tobacco plantation, and Jonah showed his familiarity with the plant by making a big cigar for himself. An occasional covey of birds flying from one bush to another suggested the nearness of spring. Indeed, the journey was more like a well-planned vacation than the beginning of an adventure which held within itself the possibilities of bloodshed and murder, as well as fortune.

Alphonse and Gaston were slow but sure. They plodded along at a leisurely gait that knew no variation. At times, attracted by little patches of vegetation, they would pause and munch the grass until they had their fill, and then jog ahead with a degree of self-satisfaction which was very donkey-like. Jonah proved more than a guide. He was truly a

companion and counselor. During one portion of the journey, Paul rode several yards ahead of Singleton, who was talking to the colored man. Suddenly a shout of fear came from the boy.

"What's the matter?" asked Singleton.

"I'm sinking!" cried Paul.

Sure enough, the donkey, standing stock still with its four feet planted in the mud, was gradually disappearing in the sticky substance.

Jonah laughed.

"You've struck a quagmire," he said.

"That's evident," was the retort, "but I fail to see the humor of the situation."

The guide appeared to be familiar with such a condition, because he prepared to meet it in a calm, business-like manner. From somewhere he managed to bring a big wide board, which he threw into the mud. After that he tossed a rope to Paul. The boy grabbed it and the two men gave a violent jerk, and Paul soon found himself on the board and from thence on to solid earth. But Alphonse was still there looking around at them with sad, pleading donkey eyes. They were in the rear of the animal and he could not be pulled out by the tail. Other tactics would be necessary. The quagmire was not very extensive, and by making a roundabout tour, the members of the party

managed to get in front of the imprisoned animal. To add to the picturesqueness of the situation, he emitted a series of yawps that echoed and re-echoed through the wilderness. Jonah deftly threw a rope around the donkey's head, and with the aid of Job and Paul, managed to pull him out of the mud. After that awkward incident, they picked their steps very carefully. Occasionally they moved to the right or left and went through small streams of water with graveled bottoms rather than trust themselves to the treacherous mud in the middle of the road. At such times their faces were swept by the overhanging branches of the trees, and it was no uncommon thing to find themselves covered with annoying but not dangerous tarantulas.

About two o'clock in the afternoon, they halted near a shady nook close by a stream of running water, and ate a hastily improvised lunch of canned sardines. Jonah had a flask of rum with him and managed to concoct a punch which Singleton drank with a great deal of pleasure, but from which Paul asked to be excused. Alphonse and Gaston were unsaddled, and they rolled about on the ground with abandon and relish. More than an hour passed before they started again, but all were greatly refreshed and their journey was resumed with renewed vigor. The roads were

rough, but neither the men nor the donkeys were greatly disturbed by that fact. Many small streams bordered the highway along which they passed. At one of them Singleton halted and pointing to a big black object in the water, asked:

“What is that?”

“That is a cayman,” replied the guide.

“Why, it looks like an alligator,” retorted the American.

“So it is, but we call it cayman.”

The hideous thing lay there basking peacefully in the sunlight. It was fifteen or sixteen feet in length, its great jaws were wide open, and its unlovely body was covered with live birds. While the strangers stood looking at it in an awed sort of way, Jonah, who had become possessed of a worn-out end of broom, approached the dormant monster and began to tickle its stomach.

“What are you trying to do?” asked Paul, alarmed.

“Wait and see,” grinned the darky.

He continued the tickling. Soon the risibilities of the monster were affected, and with a convulsive shudder it turned over on its back; and there, beneath where it had lain, were dozens of terrapin. Jonah, grinning all the while, gathered a large quantity, and placing them in a basket, fastened it to the side of

Gaston's saddle. As they moved away, the alligator, with a grunt, resumed its former position.

"Weren't you afraid?" asked Paul of Jonah.

The guide shook his head.

"Only thing I feared was that that big lubber mightn't turn over. Then we wouldn't have any terrapin soup to-night."

They camped for the night beneath a tree with great spreading branches. The evening meal revealed Jonah at his best. He handled the terrapin with the skill of a Broadway chef, and served up the most appetizing dish that Job Singleton or Paul Parker had eaten in many weeks. After it was over and the mate had enjoyed a pull at his short-stemmed pipe, they retired for the night. Two hammocks were erected for the white men, and after the wholesome fatigue of the day, they slept soundly. Jonah rested on the ground, pillow-ing his woolly head upon the side of Alphonse, and using Gaston as a nice warm footstool. His slumber was not as pleasant as that of his two friends. The presence of some particularly annoying lizards, not to speak of a stray scorpion and an occasional centipede, was not conducive to continuous rest.

However, all three were up with the sun,

prepared to resume their journey. The donkeys were positively frisky, and, before starting, indulged in a series of brays that reminded Jonah of the prophecies he had heard of the last trumpet. The roads were not so bad as they had been—an improvement due to the fact that they were approaching a town. After riding for more than an hour, Job and Paul dismounted for the purpose of indulging in the luxuries of pedestrianism. The donkeys paused to graze. Jonah, nothing loath, remained with the animals, while the two sailors proceeded on their way.

“This seems like a deserted country,” observed Paul to his companion. “Here we’ve been going it for twenty-four hours and we haven’t met a human being.”

“Perhaps it’s just as well,” replied the long-headed sailor. “I don’t imagine the sort of people you might meet in these woods would make good company.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that a revolution is on in Hayti, and the hardest characters in San Domingo are on the way to take part in the muss.”

“How do you know all this?”

The mate laughed.

“The landlord of the inn told me. You don’t suppose I’ve been sitting around like a

bump on a log, do you? I'm interested in the country and I've asked questions of every one I've met."

"I didn't think we'd run any danger of revolutionists in this part of the country."

"In a tropical country," said Singleton, sagely, "there is always danger."

As he spoke, he was attracted by a rustling sound some yards ahead of them. Paul's glance followed that of the older man. Simultaneously, they beheld two soldiers coming from behind a tree. They were colored and were grotesquely attired. Their uniforms looked as if they had been picked up in a dime museum. One carried a rusty-looking musket, while the other wore a red belt from which a scabbarded sword was suspended. They continued marching ahead until they were directly in front of the two strangers.

"Halt and give the countersign!" exclaimed the first warrior.

Job and Paul halted instantly. The mate smiled broadly.

"We can stand still," he said, "but we can't give you the countersign because we haven't got any."

"No levity," cried the second soldier, with an attempt at dignity he could scarcely maintain. "Are you friends or enemies?"

"Well," said Paul hesitatingly, "we're not enemies."

"Are you for or against Hayti?"

Job looked at Paul and Paul looked at Job. It was the mate who spoke.

"Well, as to that, I should say we were for Hayti."

"Good," responded the soldier promptly. "We are going to join the patriot army. Come with us."

Here was a dilemma.

"Oh—oh," stammered the mate; "oh—the fact is, we're very busy. We must get to San Domingo as soon as—"

"No excuses," thundered the soldier, "if you won't give us your services, give us your money. Come on! Shell out what you've got and do it quickly. We're in a hurry."

"Buncoed!" muttered the mate.

"Robbers, not soldiers!" muttered the boy.

At this juncture Jonah arrived on the scene, leading Alphonse and Gaston by their respective bridles. The two military persons took immediate alarm. The first one put his hand on the handle of his scabbard in a menacing way, while the other, dropping his musket, put his hand in his back pocket and pulled out an old army revolver.

"Who is this man?" he cried, pointing to Jonah.

Singleton smiled.

"I suppose he would be officially designated as the master of the horse. We have him with us for good luck."

The two soldiers scowled.

"If you dare to move," exclaimed the one with the pistol, pointing it at the colored man, "I'll blow your brains out."

"You can't do that, boss," retorted Jonah, shaking his head sagely.

"Why not?" was the suspicious query.

"Cause I ain't got no brains."

Job and Paul, despite their situation, laughed outright. The highwaymen, apparently, did not see the humor of the retort.

"If you dare to lift your hand," repeated the first one, "I'll kill you."

"All right, boss," replied Jonah, shaking his head comically. "I won't lift my hand. I got nuff to tend to watching these here donkeys."

In the meantime the fellow pointed his pistol at Job and Paul.

"Now pull out your pockets!" he cried.

The second robber advanced toward the man and the boy to complete the pillage. Jonah, who had been studiously employed with the donkeys, now managed to work Alphonse

around in such a position that his back was within a few feet of the man with the weapon. The darky lay down against the animals in the most innocent manner imaginable. He had a wisp of straw in his hand and with this he tickled the left flank of the donkey. The next instant Alphonse raised his two hind legs in the air and shot them out with the force of a battering ram. The glittering shoes struck the pistol and sent it flying ten yards away, while the robber, getting the full force of the blow in the side, fell sprawling to the earth. With the quickness of thought, Job Singleton grasped the situation. He let out his sturdy right arm and highwayman number two joined his comrade on the ground. Jonah was already on top of the first fellow and held him pinned to the earth. Paul was about to go to the assistance of Singleton, but the mate waved him off, saying:

“Go to my saddle, boy, and get a rope and bring it to me.”

Paul obeyed.

Singleton took the rope and with it he securely bound the man's hands behind him. The performance was repeated in every detail with the second fellow. The patriots were then relieved of their weapons. After that, they were stood upon their feet. While this was going on, Paul had conceived an idea

which he was hurriedly carrying into execution. He had two cards, several inches in diameter, and upon them he wrote with a bit of crayon, the words: "We are thieves."

These cards were pinned conspicuously upon the bosoms of the two counterfeit soldiers. When all was in readiness, the culprits were pointed in the direction of Monte Cristo. Singleton spoke with all the severity at his command:

"Now go! Keep moving all the time, and if either of you dares to look back, I'll fill your precious carcasses with hot lead."

And they marched away with military-like precision. Job, Paul and Jonah watched them until they were out of sight, and all the time, they looked neither to the right nor to the left, but kept on their way to the sea-coast. ..

CHAPTER XV

THE ADVENTURERS ARE AFFORDED A FLEETING GLIMPSE OF BILL RAMBO

THE moment the mock soldiers were out of sight Paul Parker turned and threw his arms around the shaggy neck of Alphonse. The donkey, unused to such demonstrations of affection, blinked furiously, and finally relieved his pent-up feelings by a succession of frightful brays. Job Singleton looked on curiously.

"What's the matter, Paul; losing your wits?"

"No, Mr. Singleton, I'm only trying to thank our preserver."

"All right, but while you're at it," observed the mate dryly, "you might bestow a little attention on Jonah."

Paul rushed over and put out his hand to the guide. Jonah took it rather sheepishly.

"You know we're grateful to you, don't you?" exclaimed the boy fervently.

"Sure I do, Mr. Paul; but I done guess

you're right. I think Master Alphonse here deserves the most credit."

"Well," said the mate, as if to end the controversy, "I guess there's glory enough to go 'round."

"Sure," cried Jonah with his never-failing grin; "I ain't a bit jealous of that there donkey."

Laughing blithely, they resumed their journey to Mocha. In the course of half an hour, they came in sight of the town. It was picturesque, nestling in a plain at the foot of the great hills. They met a number of people on the roads leading into the city, and occasionally passed a little cabin. Most of the inhabitants were white and the stores and dwellings, painted blue and white, had an air of neatness and prosperity not to be seen in other parts of the island. Quite a number of girls walked through the streets carrying bundles on their heads. They had pearly skins, with rosy cheeks and coal-black hair. Indeed, the people and the houses looked more like those of the United States than anything the travelers had seen since they left the Delaware breakwater.

They spent the day and the night in Mocha visiting the coffee plantations, which were numerous and well cultivated. The next morning, with the saddlebags filled with pro-

visions, the journey was resumed. On the outskirts of the town they passed through a beautiful avenue of evergreen trees. After that, the country became more barren, although not entirely devoid of interest. At one point in the trip Jonah left the other members of the party in order to renew the supply of water. He returned in a few minutes terribly excited.

"Come with me!" he exclaimed. "Come with me!"

They followed him to the banks of a muddy stream. He pointed to the water, but they could see nothing.

"What is it?" asked Paul.

Jonah looked; rubbed his eyes, and then looked again. Disappointment clouded his face.

"You're too late!" he cried, "it's gone."

"What's gone?" queried Singleton.

"The sea-cow."

"The sea-cow?" exclaimed the man and boy in chorus.

"Yes," replied Jonah. "It was a wonder. When I came here to get the water it was half way up the banks of the stream. It looked something like a seal, only bigger and not so fine. I hurried to find you so you could get a peep, but it's gone now, it's gone."

"Jonah," said Singleton, "I hope you

haven't been drinking up all of that Jamaica rum."

"Oh, boss, I haven't had a drop this morning."

"What, not a drop?"

"Well," reluctantly, "not over two or three drinks."

The incident of the sea-cow served as a topic of conversation for over an hour.

The weather was delightful, and about noon Paul and Job varied the monotony of the trip by indulging in a bath. The water was as clear as crystal and as invigorating as new life.

When the two Americans came out of the water, Jonah rubbed them with a rough towel until their skin glowed with health and vitality. After that, they ate their frugal lunch with a joy that would have been envied by many a plutocrat. The afternoon jaunt led them through a sugar-producing country. The cane brakes were intensely interesting to the man and the boy, who had never gazed on such a sight before. Finally they came to a hard broad road which brought them to the town of La Vega.

The habitation, situated on the banks of a beautiful river, seemed to be thrifty and well kept. A score of wooden houses, plainly furnished, nestled about the village

square. The strangers only remained here for a few hours, but in that time they had an opportunity of viewing all that was worth seeing. The chief place of interest was the La Vega Cathedral, an imposing structure, with handsome pillared arches and solid walls of stone. It was deserted when they entered, but there was something about the ancient edifice which filled the rough sailor and his young companion with deep reverence. Involuntarily, they fell upon their knees on the stone pavement before the high altar, and offered grateful thanks to God for all the graces and blessings He had bestowed upon them. After that a peculiar feeling of contentment pervaded their minds, and they left the sacred place feeling strangely peaceful.

From La Vega they started for Cotuy, a town of some importance. Tobacco farms lined the sides of the roads through which they passed. Here and there they encountered a native farmer who was engaged in the experiment of pig raising. Outward appearances would indicate only a partial success, for the places were badly kept and the pigs ill-favored. A portion of the journey lay along the river Yuna, a stream which was alternately muddy and clear, but which, near its source, bubbled and flowed with an

inexhaustible supply of crystal water. It was about dusk when they arrived at Co-tuy. Accommodations for travelers were so poor that they were compelled to accept the hospitality of a semi-public house. It was owned by a man and his wife who seemed perpetually tired and who at first absolutely refused to consider such a thing as guests. The sight of a handful of silver, minted in the United States of America, however, proved to be an effective argument, and by the time the village church bells were ringing the *Angelus*, Job and Paul and Jonah had been installed and were engaged in doing justice to an appetizing supper.

The cups, saucers, bowls and ladles were all fashioned out of cocoanut shells. They were immaculately clean and that fact more than compensated for their strangeness. The totally unexpected treat of a mince pie was a pleasure to Job and Paul, but the mere sight of it sent Jonah into ecstasies of delight. After supper the host said he could let the mate and the boy have a bed in the second story back room, while the guide would be furnished with a hammock beneath a thatch hut adjoining the house. This being perfectly agreeable, all hands sat about the center table in the main room and engaged in pleasant conversation. The host, who confessed that he

was from Louisiana, spoke perfect English, and that, of course, added immensely to the enjoyment of the strangers. During a lull in the general talk, Paul turned to Singleton and said in a low voice:

"Have you forgotten about Rambo?"

"Forgotten," cried the mate, "why, the rascal has not been out of my mind for a minute."

"Do you think he's reached Hayti yet?" asked the boy with a laugh.

"Yes, and started back again by this time."

"Do you think he'll suspect our destination?"

"Certainly; Rambo's no fool. He'll discover that the quickest way to Jamaica is by the way of San Domingo, and he'll make for that port at once."

"According to that he is on our heels."

"I don't doubt it at all," assented the sailor, "but I think we've got a good start of him."

"We lingered in some of the towns a long while," said Paul, dubiously.

"Yes, that's true, but still I believe we have a good lead."

"I hope so," was the doubtful reply.

"Don't be discouraged!" exclaimed the mate, giving the boy a hearty slap on the back. "We're not going to let a big lubber like that get the best of us."

Paul was so drowsy that he could scarcely sit up in his chair. Jonah deliberately lay down on the floor and went sound asleep. Job Singleton, noticing the weariness of his companion, jumped to his feet.

"Come on, my hearties. We'd better go to bed like Christians and get a good snooze and start off early in the morning."

Before retiring they went to the stables and made sure that Alphonse and Gaston were comfortably housed for the night. They had all become very fond of the homely little donkeys, and took care to see that they were given every possible attention. Paul playfully placed a handful of corn in the pocket of his coat and Alphonse followed him about the stable and, poking his comical nose in the warm receptacle, ate every grain of the food. The animals being cared for, and Jonah escorted to his thatched hut, Job and Paul retired to their own room. It was a large plain apartment with bare floors and shingled walls. There were two wide windows, one in front and the other in the rear, and both, according to custom, were open. The bed, very broad and very comfortable, was in the center of the room. They brought a tallow dip upstairs, but the moon shone so brightly that they had no need for artificial light. They talked

briskly while they disrobed, hanging their clothing on the posts at the foot of the bed. Twenty minutes after entering the room both lay under the covers with closed eyes. After some further desultory talk, came the final farewells.

“Good night, Paul.”

“Good night, Mr. Singleton.”

After that, silence.

At intervals, the croaking of the frogs in a near-by pond broke the quiet. Presently the slamming of the front door and the creaking of the bare stairs announced that the host had closed the house and was retiring for the night. Again came the tropical quiet—a quiet that cannot be adequately described in words. The heavy breathing of the man and the boy proclaimed that they were sleeping the sleep that comes to those in good health. How long this continued neither of them knew. Singleton was the first to open his eyes. It must have been one or two o'clock in the morning. He lay awake for some minutes. Presently, his attention was attracted by a creaking sound in the back of the house. He listened intently. The sound was repeated several times. The meaning of it flashed through his alert brain. Some one was trying to get into their room.

He turned over softly, and gently touched Paul on the arm. The boy awakened immediately.

"What's the matter?" he cried.

"Sh! sh!" whispered the mate.

"What is it?" asked Paul, lowering his voice.

"Some one is trying to climb into this room," said the mate.

"All right," was the answer in perfectly self-possessed tones; "lie still; don't move."

The scraping noise became more prominent. Moment by moment it became closer. Two pairs of eyes were strained in the direction of the open window. Finally, when the tension had almost reached the breaking-point, a round bullet head shoved itself above the edge of the window sill. It remained in that position for several seconds. Then it began to move again. A broad forehead seamed with wrinkles appeared in view. The two figures in the bed betrayed some agitation. Singleton reached over to a chair and seized the old army pistol he had taken from the counterfeit soldier. In the meantime, their eyes remained glued on the open window. The figure took a fresh hold on the outside and lifted itself a foot higher. The next moment a pair of dull gray eyes—mere specks set in a flabby face—peered into the dark room.

"Bill Rambo!" gasped the boy in an undertone.

"So it is, by cricky," whispered the mate, making a move to get out of bed; "I'll soon settle his hash!"

But Paul put out a restraining hand.

"Be still; don't move."

The voice, so low that only Singleton could hear it, was the voice of command, and he obeyed. He grumbled a bit, though, just to show he was not thoroughly satisfied.

"I'm not afraid," he whispered.

"It's not that," murmured the boy, "do as I say."

The head was now above the window sill. The moon, shining in all of its glory, played on the ugly face like a calcium light. Bill Rambo was not a handsome man to look on at any time, but now he was positively repulsive. The always-flabby face was bloated. The stubby nose, grown quite red, sparkled like a polished ruby. The thick neck, with its coarse flesh, was, as usual, innocent of collar or tie. He was breathing heavily. After a brief pause, during which he made a hasty survey of the darkened room, he poked a short leg over the sill and climbed inside. He must have been bootless, for his tread was soft and noiseless.

Again Singleton made a move as if to leap

from the bed, and again he was restrained by his young companion. Paul gripped him tightly by the arm, and the grip had more force than a spoken command. Resignedly, the mate lay back on his pillow to see the thing out. Rambo had his eye fastened on the left bedpost. The sleepers instantly divined the reason. Paul's trousers were there and Rambo was after the key of the golden chest. Cautiously he advanced, step by step, until he was able to grasp the garment. He did so deftly, and rolling the trousers up into a bundle, he put them under his arm, and then retreated softly and climbed out of the window.

No sooner had the head disappeared over the sill than Job Singleton leaped out of bed with a snort of anger.

"You must enjoy being robbed," he cried in suppressed tones.

"Sh! sh!" whispered Paul, putting his fingers to his lips.

"Oh!" said the mate angrily, "I'm tired of this hushing business. Tell me why you let that fellow get away with your pants. He knew the key of the chest was in your pocket. Did you want him to get it?"

Paul's only reply was to take Singleton by the arm and lead him, with cat-like tread, to the window. The moon, still shining brightly, threw its silvery rays on a carriage

standing in the roadway. Eli Dutton was on the front seat holding the reins, and Rambo, with the trousers under his arm, hastened to the team and jumped in. Dutton gave the whip to the horse and it started away at a wild gait.

"Well?" said Singleton, looking at Paul.

"Well?" retorted Paul, "we're rid of two bad men."

"Yes," snorted the mate, "and you are minus your pants."

"I can buy a better pair from the landlord for a dollar," said Paul placidly.

"But the key of the chest? You can't buy that from the landlord."

Paul walked over to the bed and tossed his pillow aside. A little chamois bag lay there. He opened it and calmly drew forth the key that had been given in his keeping by his dying uncle. He turned to Singleton.

"I hope you're satisfied now."

The mate bowed his head in understanding.

"I am."

CHAPTER XVI

PURSUERS AND PURSUED COME TO CLOSE QUARTERS AND FIGHT IT OUT IN THE WIDOW'S PASS

DAYLIGHT had scarcely broken before Job Singleton and Paul Parker were out of bed preparing for the resumption of their journey. As the boy had foreseen, he had no difficulty in obtaining a pair of trousers, and for a sum that was truly insignificant. Both realized, however, that Rambo's eagerness to possess the key of the chest indicated a desperation that would stop at nothing. The time for strategy had passed. They must press forward as rapidly as possible, and if need be fight face to face for the ownership of the prize. Jonah, who slept like a top, was aroused, and he quickly prepared Alphonse and Gaston for the road.

Jonah was in a musical mood, and his singing, together with the antics of the donkeys, brightened what would otherwise have been a rather depressing start. They had not gone far before they beheld the hills of San

Carlos glistening in the sunlight, and beyond that the gradually rising peaks of the mountain which they would have to climb. Singleton looked forward to the great mass of rock and gravel and vegetation with doubting eyes. He turned to Jonah.

"I don't believe in crossing mountains before you get to them, but how in the world are we ever going to get over that awful thing?"

Jonah's grin made his teeth sparkle like rows of pearls.

"No trouble at all, boss. I'll take you to an opening called the Widow's Pass, and if we're a little bit industrious, we ought to be on the other side of that mountain by supper time."

"Oh," said the sailor, much relieved, "that sounds better."

This portion of the country was more thickly populated than the other end of the island. Native huts, without doors or windows, and with thatched roofs, were conspicuous everywhere. The business of cattle raising was much in evidence, a sign that the people were not only industrious, but also that they had some knowledge of business methods. As they neared the foothills, the country became more heavily wooded, and there were numerous fruit orchards in a fair state of cultivation. Just before reaching San Carlos,

they found their way obstructed by a wide stream. The water was clear and shallow. While they were debating how to cross, a waterman with a raft, which was propelled by means of a long pole, came along and offered to push them to the other side. They accepted with alacrity. The float was not large enough to include Alphonse and Gaston, and as Jonah refused to be separated from the donkeys, he volunteered to wade across with the animals. Singleton and the boy reached the other side without incident. The donkeys stoutly resisted the attempt to drive them into the water and the guide had to push them in, one at a time, by main force. The moment Alphonse and Gaston touched the cold water, they began to bray vociferously. Jonah pressed them on, however, and when their feet touched the graveled bottom of the stream, the water was almost up to their eyes. They halted, and for awhile refused to either go forward or backward. Jonah mounted the back of Alphonse and took Gaston by the bridle, and by dint of much persuasiveness, in which sundry lumps of sugar figured, he managed to get them to the other side of the stream.

Once on firm earth again, they traveled very rapidly and in a short time were at the foothills of San Carlos. The donkeys,

accustomed to the country, went up the incline slowly and without any great difficulty. Occasionally they stumbled on a protruding stone and at times they had to be prodded, but on the whole, their locomotion was about as satisfactory as it had been on the level ground. In the course of fifteen minutes, the travelers reached the opening in the mountain known as the Widow's Pass. It was quite steep and very narrow—so much so that occasionally they were obliged to go along in single file. At such times, Job Singleton led the procession, closely followed by Paul. After the boy came the two donkeys, and finally Jonah. The Americans carried long poles while the guide contented himself with a short thick stick. The constant upward tramp was breath taking, but the beauty of the surroundings compensated for the discomfort. Half way up all of the party sat down and enjoyed the luxury of an hour's rest. Then the trip was resumed in good spirits, Jonah singing, the donkeys braying, Paul laughing and Job shouting out mock instructions.

The mate as usual was in the foreground. At that psychological moment he glanced upward and the sight that met his gaze caused him to stand stock still. Of necessity, the entire procession halted. The cause of the

consternation stood on a level table of ground near the very center of the Widow's Pass.

It was Bill Rambo and Eli Dutton. The two desperate characters were not slow to notice the confusion of the approaching party. Moreover, they relished the fact. It was Bill Rambo who, with a fiendish smirk about his thin lips, spoke:

"Welcome to our mountain home!"

Singleton, who was doing a great deal of thinking, paid no attention to the mock salutation. He realized that Rambo and Dutton were making a final stand, and that their only hope of reaching San Domingo was by doing so over the prostrate bodies of the two evil ones. Mentally he measured forces. It was three to two. He had the old army pistol in his belt. Paul had a repeating revolver, while Jonah was armed with his stout stick. On the other hand, Rambo and Dutton had possession of the pass, and in the mountain more than elsewhere possession is nine points of the law. Besides, the two sailors had the manifest advantage of being above them. To retreat would be rank cowardice and might be fatal. It would be to abandon the quest for which they had already come so many miles by land and by sea. Paul was at the mate's side and waited anxiously for his decision. The big fellow was not many seconds in com-

ing to a conclusion. Instead of announcing it immediately, he tried the boy.

"Shall we advance or retreat?"

"Advance!" was the prompt and unhesitating response.

Rambo, from his point of vantage, noticed the upward movement of the caravan, and he was not surprised. He gave Job and Paul credit for personal courage and did not discount their strength in the battle that was to come. There was a sneer on his lips though, as he called out:

"We're going to give you fellows a chance for your lives. If you're willing to come up here and talk it over under a flag of truce, all right. If we can't come to terms, then we'll fight it out. What do you say?"

"We're agreeable," replied Singleton, without waiting to consult with Paul.

"What's the use of dickering with that fellow," whispered the boy, "you can't trust him out of your sight."

"We won't let him out of our sight," was the good-humored retort. "We'll hear what he has to say. Every foot higher we get up the mountain is in our favor."

They advanced slowly. Finally they reached the spot where their antagonists were waiting, and here they halted. The climb had been along a narrow passageway which

compelled them to journey single file. The place where they stood was a wide level plateau. The path beyond it, leading to the other side of the mountain, was so narrow as only to admit one person at a time. Rambo and Dutton stood at the entrance to this path, effectually blocking the progress of the newcomers. In spite of this fact, Singleton was amazed that a man like Rambo should have permitted his opponents the opportunity of getting on a level with him—especially as the odds were to be as three to two. But the explanation quickly presented itself. The moment they stood facing one another, Rambo gave a low whistle and two men came creeping from behind a near-by tree.

Job and Paul involuntarily gave a start. The newcomers were the two thieves with whom they had had the adventure the day before. When they had tied the arms of the mock soldiers and placarded them and sent them on their way to Monte Cristo, they little thought they would come back to plague them and at such an inopportune time. It did not require a very keen brain to understand the situation.

After Rambo and Dutton had returned from their wild goose chase to the coast of Hayti, the first persons they met were the bound and placarded soldiers. Naturally,

they halted and heard the story of the curious looking ones. Naturally, also, the thieves blamed their troubles on Job Singleton and Paul Parker. And finally, as a bit of poetic justice, the piratical sailors got the land sharks to join with them in wreaking vengeance on the man and the boy. All this time Paul and Singleton stood facing Rambo and Dutton. It was the red-faced and blear-eyed Captain who spoke.

"You're a smart pair, but you're not quite as smart as you think you are. I ought to throw you down the side of this mountain, but I'm a peaceable man and I hate bloodshed."

Paul, incautiously, laughed outright at this declaration. Singleton, knowing the temper of Rambo, put a restraining hand on the boy. The erstwhile Captain continued:

"The odds are against you—you're not too blind to see that, I hope. It's a case of four to three and two of these gentlemen have a special reason for getting even with you. But, if you're agreeable, we'll avoid a muss. Consent to one thing and we'll part as friends."

"What is it?" asked Singleton.

"That kid there," pointing to Paul, "has a little bag which contains a key and a check, which key and check are my property. I ask

you to make him hand 'em over to me. Do this and I'll guarantee you there'll be no trouble."

"Ask him what he's done with my pants," interrupted Paul mockingly.

Rambo's face became purplish with rage. He shook his fist at the boy in a menacing way. His fury made his words almost unintelligible.

"I'll be the death of you before long. You're one of the smarty kind. You was never taught that boys should be seen and not heard."

Paul was thrilling with indignation. In spite of the dangerous situation, he could not restrain himself. He turned to Singleton with a look of amazement and pointing his finger at Bill Rambo, cried out:

"Why, I do believe the old thief's preaching."

"Thief! thief!" spluttered the red-faced one.

"Yes, thief!" shouted the boy, throwing discretion to the winds. "You stole my uncle's ship and changed its name with the aid of that pirate by your side, and not satisfied with that, you were so stupid that you let her go to the bottom of the sea."

"Stupid!" cried Rambo in a voice that sounded like a moan.

"Yes, all that and more," shrieked Paul. "I know you and I know you are a coward!"

That was the climax. The blood left the man's face. He made a leap forward.

"Do you give up that bag?"

"No!" shouted the boy, "a thousand times no!"

"Good boy, Paul!" exclaimed Singleton exultingly, patting him on the back. "I'm with you to the end."

At these words the infuriated man turned on the mate. He pulled a pistol from his pocket and aiming it straight at Job Singleton, snapped the trigger. The report rang out clear and sharp on the mountain-side, but man proposes and a Higher Power disposes. Rambo's hand wavered just the fraction of an inch, and the shot intended for the heart of his adversary missed its aim and, whizzing past the mate's head, clipped off a tiny piece of his left ear. Simultaneously with Rambo's move, Dutton also produced a pistol, but before he had time to raise the trigger, Jonah, with amazing swiftness of foot, was behind him and had knocked the weapon from his grasp. Both men stooped down to pick it up, and both tumbled over on their heads. As they made a second attempt, a chance kick on the part of Dutton pushed the weapon on the edge of the plateau, and it went rolling

down the sides of the mountain. The two thieves, armed with stout clubs, rushed into the mêlée and began pounding right and left regardless of consequences. To add to the general confusion, Alphonse and Gaston brayed at the top of their voices, and flourished their heels about in impartial and vigorous fashion.

As the battle proceeded, Job Singleton pulled out the old army revolver, but the trigger caught and it was rendered useless at the outset. Paul fired one ineffectual shot with his weapon and then it was knocked from his hand by a blow from a club wielded by one of the thieves. Presently Singleton and Rambo, finding themselves without weapons, engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle. Both men had a knowledge of the fistic art and they utilized it to the limit without being handicapped by rules or the decisions of a referee. In the meantime Dutton struck Jonah on the back of the head with the handle of his revolver and the faithful guide, spinning around once or twice, fell down in a heap, unconscious. This was the beginning of the end. The wrestling match between Rambo and Singleton continued. Once the men went so close to the edge of the mountain that it seemed a miracle that they were not thrown into the ravine below. Fighting and strug-

gling all the while, they rolled back to the center again.

In the meantime, Dutton and the two robbers quickly overcame the boy. The first thief produced a cord from his pocket and with it they tied Paul, hand and foot, and left him lying on the ground. After that it required but a few minutes for the four men to best Job Singleton. The mate fought like a mad man and when it was over, his face was covered with blood. Thief number two promptly bound his hands and feet. After that, the two rascals pulled out the placards containing the declarations, "We are thieves," and pinned them on the man and boy. Job and Paul understood. They were getting a dose of their own medicine.

"Now," shouted Rambo, gloatingly, "search the boy."

Dutton went through Paul's pockets with alacrity. He produced a curious collection, including a lot of silver money, a ten penny nail, a ball of twine, a bunch of keys, a pen-knife, and a battered silver knife. They were turned over to the Captain. He pawed through the lot impatiently.

"Rubbish," he cried. "Try again."

They did so, but with no further result. Rambo was very angry.

"I want a chamois bag!" he exclaimed.

Paul was bruised and bleeding, but a streak of humor in his composition could not be repressed. He looked at the angry Captain with a curious twinkle in his eyes.

"Do you want to know where to find it?"

"Yes," said Rambo sullenly.

"Look in the pants you stole from my room."

The Captain uttered a dreadful oath. He would have struck the boy had he not been distracted by a sensible remark by Eli Dutton.

"How about looking around his neck?" said that worthy.

"The very thing," cried the Captain; "do it."

The search proceeded. Sure enough, the chamois bag was suspended by a string about the boy's neck. It was cut away and handed to the Captain. He opened it and out came the brass check and the key of the golden chest. Rambo could not conceal his exultation. He put the two articles back in the bag and hugged it to his breast in an ecstasy of delight. Jonah lay on the ground unconscious. Job and Paul were bound and helpless. The piratical procession started off on the narrow pathway leading to San Domingo. The two thieves went first. The neighing of horses in the neighborhood indicated that they were prepared for a hasty flight. Eli Dut-

ton followed the robbers and Bill Rambo brought up the rear, triumphantly shaking the chamois bag in the air so that Paul could see it until his victors were lost to view by a sharp turn in the mountain path.

CHAPTER XVII

PAUL AND JOB, AFTER STRAYING INTO A
STRANGE CAVE, TUMBLE OVER TWO FAMILIAR
FORMS

AN hour later, Paul Parker, still bound hand and foot, turned his glance toward Job Singleton, who was in a similar plight, and said softly:

"Mr. Singleton."

"Well," said the mate, moving his head by a great effort, "what is it?"

"Do you know what has been running through my head ever since those fellows left?"

"No; what is it?"

"I've been wondering why Bill Rambo didn't kill us."

"You have?" said the mate in an awed voice.

"I have," replied the boy. "Can you tell me why?"

Singleton shook his head.

"The conundrum is too much for me. Now that you mention it, I am a little surprised

myself. In the excitement of the fight, I never thought of life or death."

"I can hardly believe he was prompted by any good motives."

"Sure not," said the mate. "It is more likely a matter of pride. He wants to baffle you in the race for the golden chest. He feels sure that it's in his grasp now and he wants to have the peculiar pleasure of taunting you over your failure."

"That's a curious explanation," remarked Paul, "but I guess it's the right one."

At that moment, the eyes of both Job and Paul turned toward Jonah. The guide still lay motionless on the ground.

"I hope the poor fellow's not dead," said Paul anxiously.

"Oh, he's not dead," answered the mate cheerily.

"How do you know?"

"I don't know; I just feel that way about it."

There was a rustling of dry leaves in one of the by-paths. The prisoners looked that way.

"It sounds as if some one was coming to our relief," said Paul.

"I hope so," answered Singleton. "These ropes are beginning to cut into my flesh."

The rustling sounds continued. Two pairs

of eyes looked eagerly in that direction. Presently a familiar face and form appeared. Paul and Job groaned with disappointment. It was only Alphonse, the donkey. Another crackling of dry twigs and Gaston appeared. The two animals, after gaining the level ground, looked about them with what seemed to be human intelligence. After awhile the eyes of Alphonse lighted on the prostrate body of Jonah. He moved over toward the colored man. Evidently the donkey expected some mark of recognition from the man. It was not forthcoming. He gave a bray of sorrow. The noise caused the guide to stir uneasily. The donkey, noting this, moved closer and rubbed his nostrils affectionately against Jonah's face. The warmth and the heavy breath accomplished the miracle. The prostrate man opened his eyes. He looked about him wildly. After that, he rose up unsteadily, but surely. He was weak and sore and badly battered, but he was able to stand on his feet. The prisoners witnessed this performance and they broke out into a cheer. The sound caused Jonah to rub his head. The minute he did so he gave a howl of pain. He had two lumps on his head as big as goose eggs. Presently, looking around again, the guide saw the man and the boy. He rushed toward them.

“’Scuse me for being so slow,” he exclaimed.

“You’re excused, all right,” laughed the mate. “If I had any medals about me, you’d surely get one. It begins to look as if we depended altogether on you and these donkeys.”

The mention of the donkeys caused Jonah to go and take Alphonse’s head in his arms and murmur the most affectionate words in his big ears. Suddenly he remembered that Job and Paul were still tied. He dropped the animal’s head and pulling out his clasp knife, rushed over and cut the hemp that held his two friends. They breathed a sigh of relief as they found themselves liberated once more. Like Jonah, they felt very sore, but the thought of being free compensated for all their pains. The guide, ever useful, discovered a pool of clear water in the vicinity, and here they washed themselves and removed the mud and clotted blood that disfigured their faces. Within an hour, they were ready to proceed.

“See here, Jonah,” said the mate, “you’ve probably discovered by this time that you are in dangerous company. A little while ago you nearly lost your life—not because of any fault of your own, but simply because you are traveling with us. God only knows

what's ahead of us. We are going forward. I know we are going into danger. It may mean death. If you care to go back to your peaceful home, now is the time to go."

Jonah lifted his head loftily.

"Don't you like me?"

"Of course I like you."

"Does boss number two like me?" turning to Paul.

"Sure," answered the boy.

"All right then," he answered.

"What do you mean?" they cried in chorus.

"Jonah will never leave you," he said with simple dignity.

In the course of an hour, everything was arranged, and once again they started for San Domingo. The descent down the mountain was swifter than the ascent on the other side. They all felt sore and out of sorts, but otherwise enthusiasm for their mission had not abated. In view of the loyalty of Jonah, they felt that it was only just and fair that he should have an inkling of the fact that they were in quest of a golden treasure. It was given to him tactfully. This knowledge threw the guide into ecstasies of delight, for he admitted with many shakings of his head that his predominant weakness was money. Half way down the mountain-side,

they came to a hut where they were able to get milk and sandwiches for themselves and a bag of oats for Alphonse and Gaston. After that, the journey was singularly uneventful.

It was nearly dusk when they struck the foothills. The mate and the boy mounted the donkeys and whipped them in the direction of San Domingo, Jonah following afoot.

"Can we reach San Domingo to-night?" asked Paul of the guide.

"I don't think so," was the reply, "but if you're satisfied with a few hours' sleep, we should get there the first thing in the morning."

"Jonah," interjected Singleton, "are you sure there is a way of getting from San Domingo to Jamaica?"

"Positive," was the quick response.

"And how often do the steamers sail?"

"They don't have steamers just now. They're running two big tugs."

"How often do they sail?"

"Thursdays and Saturdays."

Singleton looked at his little pocket calendar. He puzzled it out with much difficulty. He spoke finally, very slowly.

"This is Wednesday evening; at what hour do the steamers usually leave?"

"At eight in the morning."

"Good! We ought to be able to make it without the slightest difficulty."

At that moment, without any premonition, Paul broke into a series of shouts.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!!!" he cried.

"What's the matter?" asked the mate anxiously.

"Don't you see?" cried the boy, "that Rambo has failed?"

"What do you mean?"

"Mean? Can't you see?"

"No; tell me."

"It's simply this. Rambo has not got more than twelve hours start of us. Even if he goes right on to-night, he can't beat us more than twenty-four hours. Say he arrived in San Domingo to-day. He would be three or four days too late for the last steamer, and a day too soon for the next one. In other words, in spite of all his rascality, we start even on the very eve of reaching the treasure."

"You're right, Paul," assented Singleton. "I never thought of that."

After this encouraging information, the three travelers jogged along in a much more light-hearted frame of mind. Jonah had used several bottles of liniment on his head and the soreness was gradually growing less painful. The shades of darkness had fallen

by this time and the question was whether to camp for the night or press on a little farther. The consensus of opinion was for going ahead for at least two more hours.

Just before midnight they found themselves descending a narrow bridle path. It seemed interminable. Down, down they went along a shaded passageway and through an arch carved out of solid rock. There was a thick tropical vegetation all about them—so thick that at times it shut out all view of the moon which shone brightly overhead. Presently, the path broadened a bit and they came to a roadway with overhanging vines. These were seven or eight feet high, but at times the wanderers had to stoop to keep from striking their heads.

“Where in the world are we?” asked the mate.

A rift in the vines let in the rays of the moon and revealed a broad grin on Jonah’s face.

“You rascal,” shouted the mate, “where are we? You know; tell us. No tricks on travelers.”

“I know, sure enough,” smiled the guide. “I only wanted to see if you white men would be afraid of the horned bats.”

“We fear nothing,” said Singleton recklessly; “tell us where we are.”

"You're now in the natural caves of the island," said the guide.

"They're very close to the city, and if you leave yourself in my care I'll guarantee that you'll be in San Domingo before seven o'clock in the morning."

"That suits us all right," interjected Paul, speaking for the mate and himself. "You go ahead and we'll follow."

They proceeded cautiously. Presently there was an opening in the overhanging branches and they found themselves in a great natural rocky amphitheater fully three hundred feet in diameter. Row after row of stone seats were to be seen, all the work of that most marvelous of architects—Nature. Above were the clear blue vaults of Heaven. They remained there for some time admiring the beauty of the scene. When they proceeded it was through another narrow passageway. Owls in corners, rudely disturbed, hooted on the night air. Sometimes their faces were covered with cobwebs. It was all very weird and very tropical. Singleton was in the lead. In a little while they entered another chamber. This was roofed in and the darkness was intense. The mate, plunging forward, suddenly stumbled and fell on his face.

"Strike a light," shouted Paul.

Jonah obeyed instantly. He produced a lantern from somewhere and hurried to the assistance of the mate. Singleton took it and walked back to the cause of his downfall. He raised the lantern high in the air. There before him on the ground were the bodies of two men.

"Dead?" asked Paul, in an awed whisper.

Jonah stooped down to investigate. He looked up with a shake of his head and said:

"No, asleep."

Paul leaned over to see for himself. The moment he did so he gave a whisper of surprise.

"Mr. Singleton, these are our two robbers; the two men that helped Rambo and Dutton to defeat us this morning."

Singleton coming closer, looked for himself.

"By jove, Paul," he said, "you're right."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WEARY TRAVELERS FINALLY REACH SAN DOMINGO ONLY TO MEET WITH A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT

THE three travelers stood in the cave looking down at the sleeping men. Paul expressed the natural wonder of the moment.

"What do you make of it?"

Job Singleton took a chew of tobacco before replying. After he had masticated the weed for a few seconds, he turned to the boy.

"Why, it's as plain as the nose on your face."

Paul involuntarily touched the tip of that organ and replied, laughingly:

"That's not so very plain."

The mate ignored this humor and said slowly:

"It's evident that Bill Rambo and Eli Dutton wanted to get rid of these chaps. They were useful in helping to get the best of us in the Widow's Pass. After that they became mere excess baggage. Besides, chaps like Rambo and Dutton are very sensitive

about their company. They concluded that it would not be good policy to have two professional thieves about when they recovered the treasure chest—it might interfere with their plans.”

The sarcasm of the sailor caused the boy to laugh outright. Jonah, whose sense of humor was not so subtle, looked on blankly.

“That being the case,” continued the mate, “what do they do? Do they fight it out like men? Not much, they don’t. Because why? Because they never fought anything out like men. Instead of that, they leave these stupid dogs asleep in the cave and go about their business—which I must say is pretty shady work!”

“Do you think they’ve gone on to San Domingo?” asked Paul.

“I haven’t the shadow of a doubt about it,” answered the mate.

“They ought to be there by this time.”

“I should say so. But what good will it do them as long as they can’t sail for Jamaica until to-morrow morning?”

“Not much. Shall we go ahead or can we afford to rest for awhile?”

“I think,” said the mate reflectively, “that after we get out of this cave, it would be a good plan to rest for three hours. We easily have that much time to spare and it will

freshen us up for the remainder of the trip."

So they filed out of the cave leaving the two men to their slumber. After proceeding for about three miles, they came to a pleasant looking spot where it was decided to strike camp for three hours. In order to guard against surprises, it was planned that each man should watch an hour at a time, thus giving each one two hours' sleep. The arrangement worked admirably. Even the donkeys were rested. At midnight everything was packed up and the journey resumed. Every minute brought them nearer the goal. For a long time they moved along in silence. After an hour of unwonted activity, the lights of San Domingo came in view. Never was there a more welcome sight. At that critical stage of the game, Jonah put out a detaining hand.

"Sh! sh!" he whispered.

"What is it?" asked the mate impatiently.

"Come with me," was the non-committal reply.

Neither Job Singleton nor Paul Parker were in the mood to be diverted from their destination by the guide, but they had formed such a fondness for the black-skinned one that they permitted themselves to follow him against their judgment. They walked fif-

teen or twenty yards from off the main road until their attention was attracted by a flare of light. It came from a hollow, a bowl-shaped hole in the ground. Reaching the rim of the bowl and looking over it, they beheld a motley crowd of whites, negroes and half breeds surrounding two bantam roosters. Job Singleton instantly understood. It was a Dominican cock fight,—one of the institutions of the island. The spectators were ranged about the sides of the natural amphitheater. Some stood on boxes and barrels, while others were elevated on the steps of ladders. A series of blazing pine knots, stuck in the clay, furnished the illumination for the entertainment.

The three strangers became immediately interested in the fight. The crowd was shouting and applauding as the bleeding birds viciously attacked one another. The gambling instinct predominated. Most of the spectators, when not watching the contest, were making wagers on the result. The mate caught the contagion, and getting down on his hands and knees, peered anxiously down into the ring. Paul Parker, who was immediately behind him, said:

“We haven’t much time to spare, Mr. Singleton.”

“I know that,” was the response. “We’ll

only stay here a few minutes. I believe the one with the red and white comb will win, don't you?"

Paul made no reply, but getting nearer to the mate tried to get a closer view of the contest. In the meantime, Jonah was lying flat on his stomach, peering into the pit with sparkling eyes. Every now and then he gave a shout as either one or the other of the roosters gained a temporary advantage. For the time being, he was entirely oblivious of his surroundings. His mouth was wide open, displaying two rows of even, white, glistening teeth. He clawed the earth with his finger nails, and as the excitement increased below, he gradually worked himself to the edge of the cliff overlooking the battleground. He shouted in his frenzy:

"Hurrah for the speckled bird!"

The mate and the boy looked at their guide in astonishment. Simultaneously they called out:

"Jonah!"

But Jonah was too much engrossed with the cock fight to hear the cry. So far as the colored man was concerned at that moment, Job Singleton and Paul Parker did not exist, while Alphonse and Gaston were part of a midsummer night's dream. The roosters

were clawing wildly at each other, and the crowd was shrieking and applauding by turns. The excitement was too much for Jonah.

“Glory! Glory hallelujah!”

At that inopportune moment, a portion of the earth beneath the guide gave way and he went tumbling down in a heap on the assembled crowd below. If the heavens had opened and an avenging angel had dropped into their midst, the spectators could not have been more astonished. But fright was quickly succeeded by indignation. They perceived that Jonah was one of their own color. Two burly negroes grabbed the guide by the shoulders and yanked him to his feet. The audience quickly formed a circle about the trio, shouting suggestions about the advisability of lynching and tarring and feathering the man. Jonah smiled on them all in a ghastly sort of way as if to say, “Be patient, good people, and all will be well.” The negro who held his right shoulder was the first to speak.

“What do you mean by trying to break up this entertainment?”

“Deed I’m not trying to break up any entertainment,” chattered Jonah.

“What did you jump down here for?”

“I didn’t jump down, I fell down.”

"Fell down?"

"Yes indeedy. It was an accident, boss; I declare to goodness it was."

"What were you doing in this neighborhood?"

"I'm guiding a couple of gentlemens over to San Domingo," then looking up and beholding Job and Paul gazing down at him, he pointed to them, saying, "there they are now, boss number one and and boss number two; they'll tell you I'm all right."

The sight of the man and the boy gave the lawbreakers another fright. The two negroes involuntarily loosened their hold on the guide's shoulders. A nervous man on the fringe of the crowd cried feebly:

"Police!"

Instantly there was a drawing back. Some of the extremely timid ones took to their heels and ran for dear life. The negro who had been plucking up his courage said:

"Are you sure you're not a spy?"

"Sure, boss," replied Jonah, his smile returning.

"It's all right!" cried Job Singleton, "it was an accident. We merely stopped to take a look at your fighting main. We're on our way to San Domingo, and if you'll send our guide up here, we'll get away in a hurry."

Jonah was released instantly. The negro

spokesman took off his hat as a token of respect to the Americans, and bade them good-bye. Five minutes later, the little caravan was again headed in the direction of the city. As they passed away the travelers could hear the shouts of the crowd, proclaiming that the fight was once more in progress.

Another hour brought daylight. As the dawn appeared, they reached the hills just outside of San Domingo. The elevation gave them a magnificent view of the harbor, which, formed by the confluence of the Isabella and Ozama rivers, makes a perfect letter Y. By the aid of his field-glasses, Job Singleton could see a big boat at one of the docks, floating the British flag.

"The tug that goes to Jamaica!" he ejaculated.

"Thank goodness for that," responded Paul.

"What time have you?" asked the mate a little later.

"I'm six o'clock," said the boy, consulting his timepiece.

"Good! We'll have a chance to get a snack to eat before going on the boat."

The city presented a picturesque appearance at that hour in the morning. Off in the distance could be seen the red-colored roofs and the aged stained walls of the Franciscan mon-

astery. A little nearer were the imposing heights of the old Cathedral. Paul was speedily interested in this edifice because he had learned from the guide that it was built in 1540, and that beneath its main altar had rested the dust of Columbus, in the land of his discovery.

In a little while the adventurers found themselves in the very heart of the old city. Paul became so interested in the sight that he was in grave danger of forgetting all about the golden chest. The crowds of idle negroes hanging about the wharves, the red and white roofs of the houses, the crumbling towers on some of the older buildings, the clay huts covered with straw and thatch, the narrow streets, the curious stores, and the balconied public houses all opened vistas of a new world to the boy from the Delaware breakwater.

Finally they came to an old-fashioned hotel whose wide hallway led into a spacious courtyard. Jonah was sent to the stables with Alphonse and Gaston, while Job Singleton and Paul Parker selected a cool corner of the garden. The mate called a waiter.

"See here," he said, before ordering; "I want to ask you a few questions."

"All right, sir," with a shrug of the shoulders.

"I'm told there are two big tugs sailing be-

tween this port and Jamaica. Is that correct?"

"It is, sir."

"What are they called?"

"The *Starlight* and the *Sunlight*."

"The names sound cheerful," smiled the mate, "and I believe that eight o'clock is the hour for sailing."

"Yes, sir."

"Very good; now bring us some grub. Don't ask me to look at that funny card. I don't understand a word of it. Just bring us something good to eat."

The waiter departed with another shrug of the shoulders and a smile at his queer guests. They were served promptly and finished eating as the clock struck seven.

"Well," said the mate, rising, "we'd better start for the boat."

Paul did not reply. He sat still buried in thought.

"What's the matter?" asked Singleton.

"I'm thinking about the donkeys."

"By George! I forgot all about them."

"I didn't," said Paul ruefully; "they've been on my mind ever since I came in here."

"Why?"

"Because Jonah says it'll be impossible to take 'em over in the boat. Some funny rule made by the steamship company."

"Oh, that don't make any difference," said the sailor carelessly, "we'll soon settle that problem."

"How?"

"Sell the donkeys."

Paul's face clouded. There was just the suspicion of mistiness in his clear eyes. Singleton grabbed him by the arm and whirled him around so he could look in his face.

"Well, by Jinks! I do believe you're in love with those two ugly donkeys."

"I'm not in love with 'em," protested the boy, "but I've got to think an awful lot of 'em, and I'll hate to part with 'em."

"But the best of friends must part," suggested the mate, argumentatively.

"Yes, but that don't apply to donkeys," insisted the boy.

"Well, this is a curious problem for a sailor man to settle," murmured the mate, flopping into a chair with the clumsiness of a whale on dry land.

"Problem?" queried Paul.

"Yes, problem. Shall we part with the donkeys or shall the donkeys go with us?"

"Will they be in the way?"

"Very much in the way."

"All right," said Paul, beginning to weaken a trifle, "I'll be satisfied with any decision you make."

"Well, my first decision," retorted Singleton, "is that we'll have to get a hustle on or we'll miss that boat."

"And miss Rambo too?"

"Surely."

At that moment, Jonah came running into the courtyard wringing his hands in anguish.

"Oh, boss! Oh, boss!" he cried, looking alternately at Job and Paul.

"What's the matter?" they asked in alarm.

"Oh," he cried, "I wouldn't have had it happened for the world."

"What is it?" asked Job impatiently.

"Well, you know you told me to go out to the stable and look after Alphonse and Gaston?"

"Yes! Yes!"

"Well, I went out there and, and—"

"And what?"

"They're both gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes, sir; both stolen."

Singleton burst into a laugh.

"Forty good dollars lost."

Paul repressed a desire to cry.

"Two noble friends gone," he murmured.

"Poor Alphonse!" moaned Jonah.

"Poor Gaston!" added Paul.

And then, at a call from the mate, they hurried toward the dock. The narrow streets

were pretty well filled with people by this time, and their progress was not as fast as they had wished. But the mate, keeping in the lead, spurred the others on with frequent words of encouragement. Finally, they reached the wharf. A clock in a near-by steeple struck the hour of eight.

"Just in time," cried Singleton breathlessly.

The *Starlight* was in the dock, but, singular to state, there were no signs of life about the boat. The gangplank was not even lowered. Paul picked up a stick from the floor of the wharf and hammered on the side of the tug. In response, a man, wearing a cook's cap, came up the companionway and walked over to the side of the boat.

"What is it?"

"When does the boat sail for Jamaica?" asked the boy.

"It sailed yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"Sure."

"When does this boat go?"

"To-morrow."

"Why, I thought these boats sailed on Thursdays and Saturdays at eight o'clock."

"So they do."

"Well, then, your boat will sail this morning."

"It won't."

“Why not?”

“Because this is Friday.”

Paul drew back as if he had been slapped in the face. Singleton retreated with him. Jonah followed with a lugubrious face. All three sat down on a log. The mate spoke.

“Paul, I don’t know whether you kept the calendar or whether I did, but we’re a couple of land lubbers. We’re twenty-four hours behind time and we didn’t even know it.”

CHAPTER XIX

JOB AND PAUL, WITH JONAH, OBTAINING
PASSAGE ON THE "STARLIGHT," WITNESS AN
EXTRAORDINARY PHENOMENON

JOB SINGLETON sat with his face in his hands. Jonah moved about the wharf in a state of physical and mental perturbation. Paul tried to speak, but a troublesome lump in his throat choked the words before they were born. After a few minutes he put one hand fondly on the mate's shoulder, and said in a voice vibrant with emotion:

"Well, my good friend, it's all over, and your loyalty and labor goes for nothing."

The mate blew his nose vigorously. The next moment he recovered his self-possession. Presently he stood upright and he was the same sturdy, self-reliant sailor as of yore. He spoke in a cheerful, confident voice.

"My boy, nothing is ever actually lost in this world, not even our feeblest effort. We may not know it, but every thought, word and deed is a ripple in the pond of life that affects either ourselves or some one else. Now, don't

imagine for a moment that I'm trying to preach, because I'm not. I'm only trying to make you see yourself right. There's no such thing as defeat except self-defeat. You may be knocked down, but if you're knocked down good and hard, as the saying goes, you'll bounce up again all the higher."

Paul grasped the hard hands of the honest old sailor and wrung them with fervor. He spoke feelingly:

"Mr. Singleton, I really can't express the obligation I feel toward you."

"Then don't try," was the crisp response.

"But I will try," persisted the boy. "You not only do things, but you inspire others to do them. From what you say, I believe there is still a lingering hope that we may get the treasure chest."

"I didn't say that," corrected Singleton. "I'm only reminding you of my motto, which is 'Never say die.'"

"But do you think Rambo will reach the chest first?"

"I don't see what's to stop him," was the truthful response. "He's got a day's start of us and he has the check and the key."

Jonah, who had been listening to this conversation with wide-open ears, strolled away. Paul saw the guide engaged in earnest conversation with one of the deck hands. Presently

he came running back to them; eyes sparkling and mouth in one great grin.

"Boss number one," he cried, indicating Job Singleton, "says while there's life there's hope."

"I made some such remark," smiled the mate.

"Well, then, I'll tell you that Rambo hasn't got twenty-four hours start of you. He hasn't got a lead of more than four hours."

"What do you mean? How do you know this?" questioned the astonished sailor.

"It's easy," grinned Jonah. "I found out at the office."

"But," shouted the mate passionately, "what did you find out?"

"That the *Sunlight* did not sail straight for Jamaica."

"Go on! Go on!"

"That's all. Just before sailing time, the Captain got orders to go to Port au Prince to take on a special cargo for Kingston. She had to stay there all night to load up and she's due to leave that port at eight o'clock this morning."

"She's just leaving now!" cried Paul excitedly, as he looked at his watch.

Ten minutes later, while the adventurers still hung about the wharf, the *Starlight* began to get up steam. Paul and Job were

amazed, but the noise was sweet music to them. The mate rushed to the office of the Company.

"What's the meaning of that?" he said, pointing to the smoke that was pouring from the stack of the *Starlight*.

"The boat's going to sail in ten minutes."

"Sure?"

"Positive."

The long-legged seaman could have shouted for sheer joy. He restrained himself long enough to ask:

"But she's not due to sail until Saturday?"

"Very true, but the *Sunlight* was unexpectedly diverted to Port au Prince this trip. In order to straighten out our schedule, we're going to work in extra trip by the *Starlight*."

That was all Greek to Job, but it was satisfying. He went at it again.

"Three of us want to go to Kingston; will it be all right?"

"Certainly; we'll be glad to take you. Go aboard."

The next moment, Paul and Jonah saw the sedate Singleton in the center of the wharf, engaged in dancing the sailor's hornpipe. They hurried over to him. He explained the situation in a few wild, disconnected words. Paul could have wept with delight. With Jonah, the news merely accentuated his usual grin. Within fifteen minutes the boat had

left the wharf and was headed in the direction of Kingston. In the middle of the channel the passengers beheld a long thin line of vapor.

"Seems like smoke from another boat," said Singleton to the Captain of the *Starlight*.

"It is," he answered; "it's from the *Sunlight*."

Paul and Job drew quick breaths. The boy spoke nervously:

"It won't get in much ahead of us?"

"Not much," was the reply; "not more than an hour or so."

Fate, the inexorable shaper of destinies, seemed to be working with them. The man and the boy exchanged significant glances.

"How do we know Rambo is on the other boat?" suggested Singleton.

Before Paul could reply, Jonah had answered the question.

"Oh, boss, I made sure of that at the steamboat office. I asked them and they told me that Bill Rambo and Eli Dutton both went off on that steamer."

"Jonah," said Paul, thrusting forth his palm, "shake hands."

The guide did so with much gusto and with mock ceremony.

"Jonah," continued the boy, "you're a brick; do you hear it, a brick?"

The colored man bowed his head in acknowledgment of the compliment. The mate looked at him with twinkling eyes.

"Jonah," he said, "I believe your presence reconciles Paul to the loss of Alphonse and Gaston."

The guide gave a roar of laughter that could be heard from the stem to the stern of the boat. After a while the mate borrowed the Captain's glasses and surveyed the trackless expanse of water ahead of them. The streak of smoke still continued in the sky.

"That's the *Sunlight* all right," he said to Paul, without taking the glasses from his eyes. "I can tell from the shape of the boat that it's the sister of this tug."

"I suppose you can see Bill Rambo on the upper deck?" suggested Paul sarcastically.

"No, I can't," retorted Singleton, "but I've no doubt the rascal's there."

It was a beautiful day; not a cloud marred the sky, while the vessel moved steadily ahead over a motionless sea. Once they passed a little uninhabited island. The birds hovered over it, and by the aid of a telescope Paul could see a tiny bed of pansies just beginning to bloom. These signs appeared to be the harbingers of spring—that fruitful season when Nature garbs herself in new and fantastic attire. The boy expressed the thought to the mate, but

that practical person gave his head an emphatic shake.

"It's not spring yet—too soon, my boy."

"But what about the pansies?"

"Can't explain 'em away, unless that particular plot of ground is very warm."

"Still, we're in the tropics."

"Very true—that's probably the reason."

It was the reason, to an extent. But there was another very impressive reason, which they did not understand.

In the meantime the *Starlight* sailed ahead steadily over a placid ocean. Presently the shores of Jamaica came in view, and immediately Paul and his companion became interested. They stood on the bridge of the boat, and the Captain, by the aid of long-distance field-glasses, pointed out various objects of interest.

"There's the jail," he said, pointing to a long, narrow building on the edge of the island.

Paul turned to Singleton.

"Don't that suggest some one to you?"

"Sure; it reminds me of poor Mark Logan."

"Do you think he's there?"

"I don't doubt it at all, and we'll have to make it our business to get him out."

"How did he get there?" asked the Captain of the *Starlight*.

"By false swearing," said the mate, bitterly. "Eli Dutton, who was the mate on the *Water Witch*, swore away Logan's liberty. But we can prove it was false testimony, and we'll have him released, or my name's not Job Singleton."

The Captain evinced no interest in this recital, and the subject was changed. The long ray of white smoke still preceded them by a considerable distance. There was now no reasonable doubt but that Bill Rambo and Eli Dutton would reach shore first. Paul realized this and so did Job, but both remained silent, each disliking the thought of discouraging the other. All this time the shores of Jamaica were coming closer and closer. Presently the harbor of Kingston came in full view. Paul could see it distinctly from the bridge of the boat—a natural landing-place—with tropical foliage lining the banks of the water, and a half dozen ships lying lazily at anchor. Beyond this was the town, a wilderness of white roofs, open porches, thatched cottages and oyster-shell streets.

"Is Spanishtown beyond this?" asked Paul.

"Yes," replied the Captain, "but it's only a short run by the railroad. Here, if you take my glasses you can see the outlines of the town."

Paul did so. The view was magnificently picturesque. A great high steeple, a number of towers and scores of white roofs proclaimed a populous town. Finally, a low square building attracted the attention of the boy. It stood almost beneath the sheltering shadow of the church.

"What do you call that, Captain?"

The skipper looked twice before replying:

"That's the International Express Office."

Paul nearly dropped the glasses in his excitement. He gripped Job by the arm.

"See, Mr. Singleton, see? That's our destination. We must make for that the minute we reach Kingston."

The mate shifted his cud of tobacco easily.

"Sure, boy, we will. Of course, it's occurred to you that Rambo would do the same thing."

"Certainly."

Singleton put the glasses up again.

"The *Sunlight's* passed through the harbor."

Paul groaned.

"She's reached the wharf. They're throwing up a line to fasten to the post at the landing-place."

In his anger and impatience, Paul took off his hat, and, throwing it on the deck, stamped upon it. The mate looked at this outburst of

rage with amazement. It was a phase of the boy's nature he had never noticed before.

"It's all up, Mr. Singleton," he cried, peevishly. "We might as well turn back and go home again."

The sailor thought the same, but he did not permit himself to say so. Instead he smiled in a weary sort of way and said jocularly:

"Who knows but we may pick up a fortune in the streets of Kingston?"

At that moment a most remarkable thing occurred. The boat stopped short for a second, and then shot ten or eleven feet in the air on the top of a gigantic wave. Such a disturbance upon a calm sea amazed them all. There was a queer trembling sensation upon the water, and this quickly communicated itself to the *Starlight*, until the ship shook like an old man with the ague. All this time the machinery had been going at full speed, and they were rushing closer and closer to the shore.

Job Singleton and the Captain both had their glasses focused upon the city. Both were witnesses of the same wonder. They saw the island rock like a ship in a choppy sea. Buildings reeled and fell, and from their wake came a cloud of white dust. The vibration was felt on the boat a second time. Once again it rode on the top of a great wave to a

distance of over twenty feet, and then sank back again in the great cavity of the ocean. The shock threw Jonah on the deck on the flat of his back. He looked about him with a scared expression and made no attempt to move. Paul would have been thrown overboard if he had not had the wit to catch hold of the rail in front of the pilot house. Singleton alone stood his ground. These sensations all occurred within a period of half a minute. The moment they recovered, the three adventurers turned to the Captain of the vessel. He read the question in their eyes and he answered it in one short, crisp sentence:

“Kingston’s been struck by an earthquake.”

CHAPTER XX

IN THE MIDST OF DESOLATION AND DESTRUCTION ONE WHO WAS FORGOTTEN COMES IN THE GUISE OF VENGEANCE

FIVE minutes before the earthquake shock, Bill Rambo stood in the bow of the *Sunlight* chuckling over the cleverness with which he had outwitted Paul Parker and Job Singleton. His beady little eyes twinkled with amusement as he showed Eli Dutton the chamois bag containing the check and the key which were to be the opening wedges to fortune. Dutton looked at his confederate with half-closed eyes as he said:

"It's as good as in our pockets, Rambo."

"Sure," was the gleeful response. "Nothing on earth can beat us now."

Dutton puffed away at his pipe in silence for a few moments. Presently he expressed a thought that had been in his mind for many days.

"Bill!"

Rambo did not relish the form of address. It implied a degree of intimacy that might prove troublesome in the near future.

"What is it?" he cried, gruffly.

"Bill," continued the other, "when we get the swag, it's to be share and share alike, ain't it?"

Rambo shifted uneasily from one foot to the other before answering. In his heart, he had long ago resolved that his should be the lion's share of the money. He contemplated giving Dutton merely enough to shut his mouth. It would not do, though, to precipitate a quarrel at this critical stage of the quest. He looked at his second mate evasively. He spoke in the tones of an injured man.

"Dutton, I've always treated you squarely, haven't I?"

"Yes, but—"

"No buts about it. You know me and I know you. I'll treat you on the level; you can rest assured of that."

"How much does that mean?"

"How do I know what it means?" shouted Rambo, irritated into a display of his bad temper. "We can't tell what's in the chest until we get it, can we? You're worse than an old woman, you are."

"Well," said Dutton, "I took some chances to help you get here."

"What chances?" asked the red-faced one, curiously.

"Mark Logan," responded the other

promptly. "I swore him into prison, I did, and you know it. He's a bad man and if he'd been at large, you wouldn't have had a ghost of a show for the chest."

"Why not?"

"Because he intended to go into a combination with the kid and Singleton. And if he had, you couldn't have beaten 'em."

"Maybe not," said Rambo indulgently; "however, I'm willing to give you the credit of getting rid of Logan. He wasn't a very proper person, I'll admit that."

This gracious condescension pleased Dutton, and the incipient quarrel was checked.

All this time the *Sunlight* was drawing nearer to the wharf. The machinery was shut down and a deck hand standing in the bow of the boat threw a heavy hawser to a man standing on the wharf. He caught the clumsy thing and quickly fastened it to an iron support.

At that moment, an astonishing thing occurred. The waters arose as if by a miracle and tossed the *Sunlight* about as if it were a bit of cardboard. In the rebound, the boat struck the wood of the wharf and Rambo and Dutton and the others were thrown flat on their faces. As they regained their feet, they felt a curious sensation akin to seasickness. The city of Kingston appeared to be toppling

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over. Rambo, coarse-natured and devoid of imagination, laughed loud at the thought, but before the ribaldry had died on his lips, a row of houses was dashed to the earth and became a pile of debris. The time for mirth had passed. The bloated red face of the braggart went white and he trembled like an aspen leaf.

To add to the terror, the wharf crumbled like a stale cake and the crumbs dissolving, fell into the waters of the harbor. The Captain of the *Sunlight*, cool and self-possessed, realized that the island had been struck by an earthquake. The first quake would probably be followed by others. Immediate action was necessary. He turned to the terrified crew, who gathered about him like a flock of wet chickens. He pointed to a section of the wharf that still remained intact.

"The gangplank! Quick, before it's too late!"

A dozen men grabbed the heavy thing and shoved it into position. All hands were summoned, and then, one at a time, on their hands and knees they crawled on to the shore. Danger hovered about them like a great, dark, mysterious figure. But the greatest peril lay on the boat in the harbor. The first one to reach shore was Bill Rambo, and he was closely followed by Eli Dutton. The Captain was the last to leave the *Sunlight*.

The streets leading to the wharf were filled with people, white and black, all in a panic. There was an immense boulder near the pier, and Rambo and Dutton climbed up on this to get a better view. It was not a second too soon. After the earthquake shock, the waters had receded from the land, but in a few moments a series of gigantic waves rushed in again and swept everything before them. In half a second of recorded time, mountains were riven, the earth yawned, and thousands of tons of earth and rocks fell into the valley, burying the people beneath their dead weight. The boulder on which Rambo and Dutton were seated shuddered for a moment and then split into several pieces. Most of it fell into the harbor, but the section on which the two men were seated dropped to the land side and they were thrown to the ground with only a few bruises. After that there was a rumbling thunder in the bowels of the earth. For a time it seemed beneath them, and again it appeared to be miles away. A strange stillness came over Nature. Not a leaf or bird stirred, and the quiet was the quiet of death.

Rambo and Dutton hurried into the city, and there everything was activity. The natives were crying and praying and wringing their hands hysterically. Two black-robed Jesuits, who had been giving a mission in an

adjoining church, came out and used their power to calm the multitude. Men and women, wounded and stricken to the earth, begged for assistance. A score of them grasped the robes of the priests, and in frenzied tones begged for help.

"Bless me, Father, before I die!"

"Oh, Father, hear my confession!"

"Please give me the last rites!"

"Oh, for a doctor to bind my wounds!"

In the midst of all the excitement and misery, the ministers of God moved swiftly about with calm assurance, binding up a wound here or there, giving a cup of cold water to one, confessing another, and administering the final rites of the Church to a third. And all the time the people were becoming more reasonable. The voices they heard were the voices of authority, and the hands that touched them were the hands of accomplishment.

Rambo and Dutton did not relish the sight of suffering, and they were not in the mood to help alleviate it. So they hurried as quickly as possible from the crowded section of the city. Presently they came to a distillery, and here a horrible sight met their view. Over three hundred negroes were in the street fighting for free rum, slashing each other in the faces with machetes and yelling like demons. They had begun to sack the warehouse immedi-

ately after the first shock, and had now nearly completed their work. While the two white men stood there, the doors of the distillery were thrown open and a burly fellow came out carrying a case on his head containing a dozen bottles of rum. The mob attacked him like madmen. The case was thrown to the ground and many of the bottles were broken. Other negroes crowded about barrels and sucked the whisky through straws. All, with few exceptions, were insanely drunk. To add to the horror of the scene, dead bodies lay about in the streets and gutters, with none so poor as to do them reverence. Rambo felt a desire to scramble for some of the whisky, but there was murder in that mob, and he wisely checked his desires and went his way.

Presently their way brought them out into the open country. There all was desolation, but without the noise and confusion that existed in the city. Rambo was anxious to know whether they were on the road to Spanishtown, and he paused at a house by the wayside to make inquiries. It was a frame dwelling almost split into two equal parts by the earthquake. The two men walked to the front door together, and as they reached the threshold, Dutton said suddenly:

“You go in and inquire, Rambo. I’ll walk

slowly along the main road where you can join me."

Rambo walked in the house, while Dutton went his way. No one was in the parlor. The floors were filled with plaster from the walls, while broken mirrors and pictures littered the room. The intruder called loudly, but there was no response. He walked into the dining-room, and there the chaos, if anything, was worse than in the parlor. But in one corner, apparently undisturbed, was a daintily set table. It was covered with a snow-white cloth, and on it was a bottle of wine and two platters containing cheese and crackers. Two plates and two unused napkins completed the furnishings. It was evident that some couple was just ready to sit down to the table as the crash occurred. Terrorized, they had probably rushed from the house without further thought of their appetizing meal. The sight of food and drink brought Rambo to the table with a rush. He seated himself on the only whole chair in the room, and proceeded to satisfy his appetite. He did it calmly, deliberately, and with a relish that was characteristic. For the next ten minutes he forgot all about the existence of Eli Dutton.

The second mate proceeded leisurely along the main road. He was so engrossed in his

thoughts that he gave little attention to the signs of destruction and desolation that were to be seen on every side. He thought very slowly at best, and his mind just now was not very clear. But he meditated in a crude sort of way upon Bill Rambo and the treasure chest. He knew that the red-faced one was devoid of all principle, and that if he gave up a single penny of the booty, it would be solely because he was forced to do so. How to get his share of the money was a problem worth the solving. It might be well to make a positive compact with Rambo, but then Rambo would break a compact with the same cheerfulness with which he would smash a head. Suddenly an alluring temptation assailed Dutton's mind. It came with such force that it made him stand still in the middle of the road.

"Why not take the chest himself?"

No sooner had he grasped the thought than he began to outline his program and to justify the proposition. Rambo, he reasoned, had no more right to the money than himself. Indeed, all things considered, he was the man who was entitled to the cash. In all of these calculations, Paul Parker and his widowed aunt were left out of consideration. Such is the logic of thieves. He looked back in the direction of the house where he had left Rambo. There were no signs of the gimlet-

eyed Captain. The second mate guessed with unerring accuracy that his superior had found food and drink. That would mean a long session. Should he wait? He answered himself promptly. No! The next moment he was striding in the direction of Spanish-town, heart and soul and mind centered in the chest of gold in the old-fashioned warehouse. He had thought out each successive step of his plan. He had the cunning of his class and it was never keener than at this particular moment. He was without the check or the key, but the island was in chaos, and under such conditions the ordinary systems of business would be brushed aside. At least he proposed to brush them aside. He knew enough about the mysterious chest to describe it, and he felt sure of his ability to tell a plausible story to the custodian of the treasure. The fact that the express officials were in absolute ignorance of the value of the package in their charge was a great point in his favor. With confusion reigning everywhere, what did one trunk more or less mean to them. He would get it and hasten away from Jamaica and then retire to some quiet corner of the earth and enjoy the money which he had won after so much hard work and clever thought. The plan worked out so well in his mind that it made him positively happy. He sang

blithely as he hurried along. It meant a long tramp to Spanishtown, but the prize he sought justified the labor and fatigue. He continued without interruption for the best part of a mile. At the end of this stretch, a group of half-naked coolies broke upon his view. A child who was in advance of the others rushed to him and cried out in frightened tones:

"Oh, mister, something terrible's happened."

"I know it; the earthquake," he answered with a superior smile.

"Oh, no, not that; something worse."

"What is it?" he asked, interested now.

"Why, the jail's been smashed to pieces and all of the prisoners have escaped."

Without waiting to say any more, the terrified child ran on, followed by the other panic-stricken natives. Dutton halted for a moment to consider the situation. He was not anxious to come in contact with a mob of desperate men. Besides, it would cause him unnecessary delay and every minute counted now until he should reach the golden chest.

While he was meditating, there was a rustling of the bushes on the side of the road, and a dozen stripe-suited convicts burst into view. Their closely cropped heads, the furtive eyes and the prison pallor of their faces did not mark them as the pleasantest

company in the world. Some of them carried clubs that had been picked up by the wayside, while others held bricks in their hands prepared to resist every attempt to deprive them of their unexpected liberty.

The three or four men who were in the lead halted abruptly when they beheld Dutton. The sullen look in their eyes boded no good for the sailor. But if there was fear in his heart, he did not show it in his face. Indeed he adopted an almost jocular tone.

“Boys, don’t be afraid of me. I’ve no intention of interfering with you. Go on and good luck to you.”

Some of the jail birds cheered this sentiment. The others remained silent. All of them moved quietly along the side of the road. Dutton breathed a sigh of relief. He congratulated himself on having averted a possible danger. At that moment, the last convict in the line turned and gave a hasty look at the second mate. Some impulse caused him to drop out of line and come back to where Dutton was standing. He walked slowly and with his head bowed low. The second mate did not notice the fellow until he got within a few feet of him.

He was about to speak when the convict hauled off and struck him a furious blow square in the face. It brought the blood and

caused all of the evil in his heart to burst out in a horrible oath. But the man in the striped suit followed the first blow with a second in the same place. Dutton, frenzied and enraged, struck back, but his shot fell short of the mark and inflicted little damage. The second mate, who was a powerfully built man, prepared for a battle. He sized his opponent up quickly. He mentally wondered why the fellow should attack him and calculated upon his chances of getting the best of the man. All this time the convict kept his head lowered. Dutton noticed for the first time that he had a belt around his waist, and that he carried a rusty knife—a sort of dirk, evidently picked up in the road. The convict reached for the knife and lifting his head, looked Dutton squarely in the face. The leering countenance came upon him like a bad dream. The second mate reeled back like a man afflicted with sudden weakness.

“Mark Logan!” he gasped.

“Aye,” responded the other, “Mark Logan come to pay a little debt he owes you.”

Both were motionless for a few moments. When Dutton spoke again his voice was tremulous, and the spasmodic working of his features betrayed his terror as he gasped out:

“I didn’t mean to do you no harm, Mark.”

“I don’t mean to do you no harm, Eli,”

mimicked the convict, with a horrible distortion of the face.

"All right," replied Dutton, hopeful yet fearful, "let's shake hands on it."

"Not till I pay my debt to you," said the other, with a dull look in his fishy eyes.

"What do you mean? What do you mean?" screamed the second mate.

"I mean to pay my debt to you," cried the convict, passionately. "You've done enough harm in the world."

The two men were all alone on the desolate plain. The other convicts had gone their way. A gust of wind coming from the sea went through the bushes with a sort of moan. They locked in a fierce embrace. Logan tried to use his knife, but could not. Once again they wrestled, and this time the struggle ended by Dutton falling to the ground flat upon his back. The convict, his eyes dilated with passion and hate, raised the knife high in the air, but just at that psychological moment the sun, coming out in all its force, dazzled his eyes. He looked up and in the distance he saw a golden cross glistening in the sunshine. It surmounted the dome of an academy conducted by the Sisters of Mercy in the stricken island. It was one of the few things left unshaken by the earthquake. The sight of the sacred emblem was at once a reminder and a

warning. Like a flash the memory of his misspent life passed before the man. The rage and hate died out of his heart. He gave a cry of horror and threw the rusty dagger far away. Dutton, lying on the broad of his back, watched the performance in amazement. He spoke huskily:

“Don’t you intend to kill me?”

Logan shook his head. The tears streamed from his eyes. He fell on his knees and then, in that desolated country, with only his enemy to see him, he made a fervent, heartfelt act of contrition.

Dutton arose slowly, painfully. He was awe-stricken. The sight of a human soul in its agony was a new sensation to him. For a long, long while he sat there in perfect silence. But his dull brain was working. When he spoke finally it was with a certain awkward eloquence.

“Logan,” he said, “I’ll never forget this, and if my life is spared I’m going to try and make reparation.”

At that moment a squad of soldiers came in sight. A lieutenant, who was in command, saw the two sailors.

“Come on, boys,” he shouted; “here he is, with another rascal for company.”

In a trice Logan and Dutton were bound hand and foot.

"Let 'em stay here for the present," ordered the officer, "while we skirmish about the neighborhood."

As the soldiers tramped away, Dutton looked over at his companion and said, with a new timidity:

"I'm the cause of all your troubles."

Logan shook his head with a wan smile.

"We shape our own lives. I've no one to blame but myself."

CHAPTER XXI

BILL RAMBO, AFTER BEHOLDING AN UNUSUAL
SIGHT, FINDS HIS PLANS FRUSTRATED

BILL RAMBO, seated in the abandoned house, ate the food and drank the wine with a gusto that was almost piggish in its gluttonous manifestations. The table had been set for two, but accommodating himself to circumstances, the sailor devoured every vestige of the edibles and drained the bottle of wine to the very dregs. After finishing, he found an easy chair, and dropping his big hulk of a body into its capacious depths, he laid back with a grunt of satisfaction. He dozed for ten or fifteen minutes, awakening finally with a start. He remembered that Dutton had gone on ahead of him, and thought he was waiting for him further along the road. So he pulled out his short-stemmed pipe, and loading up with fine-cut tobacco, he lit it, and marched out of the house into the highway.

No one was in sight. Dutton was evidently too far ahead to be seen. He laughed

at the thought of the feast which the second mate had missed. Suddenly a suspicion of treachery crossed his mind. Suppose Dutton would conceive the idea of stealing the chest himself!

"Bah," he soliloquized, "I'm getting to be a baby. He couldn't get it if he tried. I've got the check and I've got the key, and without them the box is as safe as if it were locked up in the vaults of the Bank of England."

He paused by the roadside and pulled out the little chamois bag which held the coveted articles. First came the check with its number and the caption: "International Express Company" cut on its brass face. Then the key, large, rusty and suggestive-looking. He carefully put them in the bag again, and tying it up, deposited it in his trousers pocket. The examination appeared to strengthen his confidence in his confederate. At any rate he walked along briskly with the air of a man who has important business on hand. For half an hour he tramped through the devastated country, and did not meet a living soul. Although he walked very rapidly, there was still no signs of Dutton. The red-faced one had forgotten that he spent an hour in satisfying his desire for meat and drink and sleep. He puffed at his pipe and

kept on his way with the dogged determination common to seamen.

As he rounded a curve in the road, he came face to face with a curious sight. A dozen men, more or less, dressed in shabby striped suits, were stealing around the hedges in furtive style. For the moment Rambo was puzzled. Afterward it dawned on him that the men were convicts and that they had broken prison. What more probable than a general jail delivery during the chaos caused by the earthquake. How should he talk and act? The instant the questions came into his head, they were answered. He plumped down on the ground and propping himself against a bit of fence, pretended to be sleeping off a debauch. The task was not at all difficult. The red face, the shiny pug nose, and the breath all contributed to a successful performance. The convicts came on cautiously. One in the lead beheld the sleeping sailor.

"Hist!" he whispered to the others.

They halted. The speaker crept up to where Rambo lay and looked at him with keen, searching eyes. He turned to the others and waved his hand.

"It's all right, boys, come ahead," he called in subdued tones; "the fellow's asleep."

They responded on tiptoe. Once away

from the vicinity of the pretended sleeper they breathed more freely. As they hurried ahead, one of the prisoners exclaimed:

"How much longer is this thing to keep up! I'm tired out. This suspense is awful. I'd sooner give myself up than be hunted down like a dog."

"It's all right," said the leader in conciliating tones. "We'll soon be out of our difficulty. There's a house up the street where we can get a change of clothes and rid ourselves of these accursed stripes. After that, in all the confusion it will only be a question of time when we can make our way to perfect safety."

"Where's number thirteen?" exclaimed one of the convicts suddenly.

"Who's that; the sailor?" came the answering inquiry.

"Yes."

"Why, he dropped off down the road."

"What will we do about it?" asked another.

"Do about it," retorted the leader, "we won't do anything about it. We've got to go straight ahead. The sailorman will have to take care of himself."

And so they passed on. When they were entirely out of sight Rambo raised himself from his recumbent position and looked after them with a leer.

"Fools," he muttered, "they don't know they passed by a fortune to-day. Such blockheads deserve to be wearing stripes."

After an interval of yawning he resumed his journey. The road was rough and uneven, and he was beginning to feel footsore and weary. But it would never do to halt with a box of gold at the other end of the line. He must get that first and afterwards enjoy his ease. Thoughts of treachery on the part of Dutton assailed him at times, but he resolutely put these little imps of uneasiness aside. The big meal he had eaten, not to mention the bottle of wine he had consumed, gave him a feeling of drowsiness. He was filled with a consuming desire to lay down by the roadside and enjoy a good long sleep. But he fought the desire with an energy that was unusual to his indolent nature. His thoughts were scarcely ever off the chest and its golden treasures. While he was musing, he was walking, and by persistence he managed to put many miles behind him. Presently he heard the sound of regular footsteps. Looking up, he beheld a young lieutenant and a squad of soldiers.

"Halt," came the command in strident tones.

Rambo halted. The lieutenant looked at him keenly, and then—

"What are you doing here?" came the irrelevant question.

"Looking for my family," was the lying reply.

"Who are you?"

Rambo halted for just a second and then the answer came quickly:

"Captain James Hawkins of the *Water Witch*."

Inwardly he thought:—

"Hawkins and the *Water Witch* are both gone, so that's no harm done."

The lieutenant looked the sailor over carefully. After a brief pause, he said:

"What are you doing here?"

Rambo lifted up the sleeve of his coat and wiped a false tear from his eye before replying.

"I'm looking for my wife and children. They were at Port Antonio when this terrible earthquake occurred. I don't know whether they're dead or alive."

This was all said in tearful tones. Toward the close of his reply the rascal actually put his face in his hands and shook with emotion. The counterfeit is frequently more effective than the genuine. The soldiers looked aside and some of them struggled with troublesome lumps in their throats. The lieutenant spoke kindly.

"I'm sorry to have brought up such sad thoughts."

"Oh, don't mention it," cried Rambo, throwing in an additional snicker for good measure.

"By the way," resumed the lieutenant, "did you notice a party of convicts in this neighborhood?"

"Yes! Yes!" was the hurried exclamation. "They passed me on the road not more than half an hour ago."

"Thank you," responded the lieutenant.

"Carry arms!" he called to the squad.

They did so.

"Forward march!"

Rambo watched them until all he could see was a cloud of dust which they left in their wake. He resumed his own march with a groan of weariness. Every step seemed a little harder than the one that preceded it. Still he plodded on with a persistence that could not be gainsaid. In this way he managed to cover two or three more miles of the journey. Presently from a clear sky came a drenching rain. It added to his discomfort, but he ignored it with stoicism. His eyes were half closed, and as he hurried along his foot struck some soft substance and he stumbled and almost fell. He looked down and there before him lay the body of a man,

Rambo looked again, and he gave a shout of surprised recognition.

It was Eli Dutton.

The seaman stopped and rudely shook his late confederate.

"Hey, there, old man, wake up or you'll be late," he yelled coarsely.

But there was no response. As Rambo turned, his eyes fell upon another man only a few feet away. He went closer. He gave a gasp.

It was Mark Logan.

The man wore the garb of a convict.

Rambo stood there for some moments contemplating the two men. Both were unconscious. They had probably fainted from weakness. A closer examination showed that Dutton and Logan were bound hand and foot. By easy stages, the story began to dawn upon the befuddled brain of Rambo. He could easily understand that Logan had escaped from prison and meeting Dutton, had fought with him. But who had tied them? Who was responsible for that? The soldiers! Like a flash the answer came to him and he saw the whole affair as clearly as if he had been present and witnessed the business.

When he moved away he was actually chuckling. One by one his confederates were being taken off, and he was left alone to get

the chest of gold. The notion made him gleeful. He had no sorrow for Dutton or Logan—not the slightest pang of grief or remorse. The only sensation he felt was one of joy at being able to grab all of the plunder. He got out into the main road again, and as he did so, he gave a parting glance at the two men. There they lay, side by side, with the unpitying rain pelting down upon their unprotected faces.

Before Rambo had gotten far away from the sight, the rain ceased and the sun appeared. After walking rapidly for about a half hour, he sat down and waited for his clothing to dry. In that surprising climate, anything is possible. It dried in ten minutes and he was none the worse for his wetting. The houses of Spanishtown were now in sight and their white roof tops were like so many beckoning fingers. He plunged ahead, occasionally breaking into a run in order to reach his destination the sooner.

Every detail of the place was indelibly imprinted upon the tablet of his imagination. The first landmark he looked for was the steepled church; after that, only a short distance away, the long, low, narrow white-washed express office. Reaching the edge of the town, he halted and pulled out the chamois bag. From it he carefully extracted the

brass check and the key. He wanted to be prepared so that no time should be lost in the delivery of the box. He held the coin and the key tightly in his grasp and continued onward. He reached a street finally and walked many blocks. The steeple was nowhere in sight. Finally he reached a great pile of debris. A native was standing gazing mournfully at the pile of rubbish.

"I say, partner," said Rambo, breaking in roughly on the man's reverie, "I'm looking for a big church with a high steeple in this neighborhood. Can you tell me where to find it?"

The man shook his head.

"You won't find it."

"Why not?" savagely.

"Because," pointing to the heap of wood and iron and broken timbers, "it's all there in that pile."

"Gone?"

"Yes; destroyed by the earthquake."

"But the express office! The express office that stood near it! What about that?"

"Gone too."

Rambo looked at the man wildly. He ran over to him, shook him by the shoulders and shouted shrilly:

"Don't you lie to me."

The man looked at him impassively and pointed ahead.

"Go see for yourself."

Almost blinded by rage and disappointment, Rambo hurried on. How he reached his destination he never knew. The sight he gazed upon was desolating in the extreme. The express office was utterly demolished. Not one stone of the foundation stood upon another. The woodwork was piled up in heaps mingling with sea-weed and piles of rocks. Many of the boards were floating about in the waters of the bay, and one that attracted Rambo's attention had painted on it, "International Express Office." It was the sign that had hung in front of the warehouse. A coolie in overalls stood by the wreckage.

"Do you know anything about this place?"

"Sure," was the reply in soft tones. "I worked there all right."

"Have the officers given up all hope?"

The coolie looked at the speaker as if he thought him demented.

"What else could they do?"

"I don't know," was the irritable response, "that's why I asked you."

"Of course they've given up," was the half-contemptuous reply.

"But the stuff?"

"The stuff?"

"Yes, the boxes, the bags and things that were stored there. Were any of them saved?"

The man laughed.

"Not a rag. The trunks and boxes have floated out to sea or sunk by this time."

Rambo's eyes were glittering like tiny balls of fire.

"Of course," he said feverishly, "of course the Company is responsible for the value of the stuff. You see," he said, opening his hand and showing the coin and the key, "I have a check for a valuable box that was left here for safe keeping. This proves the ownership of the chest. Of course the Company will be responsible for that?"

The coolie burst out laughing.

"When we have an earthquake down here, no one's responsible 'cept the earthquake."

Slowly the idea penetrated the dazed brain of the disappointed man. His fist was clenched so tightly on the check and the key that they cut his hand. He opened his fingers, and with an oath that made the colored man shudder, threw the check out into the water. Curiously enough, he kept the key. A block or two away a sign, flapping in the wind, announced the survival of an inn. With

his head down between his shoulders, Rambo headed in that direction. He felt the gall and wormwood of defeat. He felt it in a dumb, sodden sort of way. He pushed his way into the inn and, dropping into a chair, pounded loudly on the table with his fist. The landlord, when he came, found him in a stupid reverie. He tapped him on the shoulder. Rambo, looking up with bloodshot eyes, said huskily:

“Get me something to drink.”

CHAPTER XXII

PAUL AND JOB LOOK UPON THE SUNNY SIDE
OF LIFE AND MEET WITH ASTONISHING RE-
SULTS

TWELVE hours after Bill Rambo had disconsolately retired to the wayside inn, Paul Parker, Job Singleton, and the ever faithful Jonah arrived at Spanishtown. They traveled in a covered carriage which had been secured at Kingston. The vehicle was dismissed as soon as they reached the town and the trio proceeded on foot to the office of the International Express Company—the mecca of all their hopes and fears. They gave one glance at the pile of debris and, turning on their heels, walked up the street. Paul's face was very white, and he gulped pretty hard once or twice, but otherwise his emotion was concealed. Job Singleton puckered up his lips and began to whistle. Jonah, feeling that he was called upon to do something, executed a cake walk in the middle of the road.

Thus did the adventurers accept the greatest defeat of their lives.

It would be untrue to say that they were not disappointed, but the strenuous life they had been leading had broadened their natures, and given them a philosophical disposition that bred cheerfulness and hope. After a turn or two about the wharf, Paul and Job seated themselves upon a berry chest. Singleton looked out on the waters with strained eyes. Presently he turned to his companion

“I do believe the sun’s coming out.”

Paul arose and slapped the giant on the back. He smiled as he spoke.

“Mr. Singleton, the sun’s always out for you. If I had your strength and your courage and your bright nature, I’d be the happiest boy in the world.”

The mate looked a bit confused at this unexpected tribute. He brushed the back of his hand across his eyes and wiped away a couple of tiny objects that glistened there. The next minute he was on his feet shouting rather roughly:

“Here, we’ve got to be up and doing. We can’t sit about here wasting valuable time.”

“What do you mean?” asked the astonished boy. “You don’t suppose there is the faintest hope, do you?”

“We’re alive, ain’t we?” cried the mate.

“Why, yes—”

“Well, that’s everything. If there’s a

breath of life in your body and you've got the will, there's always a chance to make good."

From where they stood they could plainly see the desolation wrought by the earthquake in Spanishtown. On the roadside was a great house with its wide hallways and its empty rooms exposed to view. All that remained of the church was a heap of stucco work mixed indiscriminately with blackened boards and dirt and water. The pretty bridges had disappeared and the long rows of cocoanut trees, with their graceful overhanging branches, had been torn up by the roots. The work of clearing the ruins was beginning in a confused sort of way. Bodies of the dead were taken out to sea and thrown overboard. Another pile of corpses on land served as a funeral pyre. The authorities silenced the objections of the natives to this disposition of the dead by informing them that burning the bodies was essential to the public health. The town was pretty well deserted, for, after the first shock, there had been a mad rush of refugees toward the harbor of Kingston. The negroes, paralyzed with fear, were not very useful. Job and his two companions volunteered their services to the officials of the town and they were gladly accepted. All that day they toiled terribly. At night they slept on the ground under an awning, which, being full of holes, was

useless to protect them from rain. In the morning, after a breakfast which consisted of dry bread and coffee, they were thanked for their assistance and informed that their services would be no longer required. Paul told the city official of the valuable box which they had expected to find at the office of the express company.

"Why don't you get a rowboat and cruise about the neighborhood a bit?" asked the man.

"I never thought of that," was the reply.

"Well, it's worth while. You can't tell what you may come across. There's a rowboat at the foot of the landing; nearly worn out, but if you can use it, you're welcome to it."

The boy broached the subject to Job Singleton, and he welcomed the news with the eagerness with which a starving man might accept a crust of bread. They examined the rowboat. It was unusually large, being similar to the kind used by life-saving crews. It had one pair of oars, and this led to the suggestion that Jonah be left ashore. The guide, however, pleaded so hard to be taken along that they grudgingly consented to make him one of the party. At the outset he proved his value by suggesting that a luncheon of some kind be taken along. A coolie in the neighborhood, acting as messenger, succeeded in

getting them a bag of crackers, a box of dried beef, and a large jug of cider. As they were starting out, Paul thought of Bill Rambo.

"I wonder what became of him?" he asked Singleton.

"The Lord only knows," replied the mate; "but I guess he's been here. After seeing the awful ruin he's probably got disgusted and gone away."

"Say, boy," remarked Jonah to the coolie at this juncture, "did you see a stranger around here yesterday? A little man with short legs and an ugly mug?"

The coolie paused a moment before replying. He looked very thoughtful. Presently he spoke:

"Did he have a red face?"

"Yes!" eagerly.

"And little eyes?"

"Yes! Yes! What about him?"

The native pointed to the inn on the hill-top.

"He's over there. He's asleep in the bar-room now."

Singleton turned to Paul with a significant look.

"The condition of our health," he said gravely, "requires us to get in this boat and get away from shore as soon as possible."

"I agree with you," responded Paul, entering into the spirit of the thing. "I think my nerves need plenty of salt air."

"Me too!" said Jonah, without knowing what they were talking about.

Ten minutes later they pulled from the shore and slowly made their way through the mass of wreckage that cluttered the bay. Jonah pulled on the oars, while Paul and Job were on the lookout. They scanned closely the rubbish that floated by on either side, in the hope of finding something resembling the chest with the golden treasure. Before they got fairly out in the bay their vision was obstructed by great, dense volumes of smoke coming from the direction of Kingston. The city was on fire. The flames were finishing the destruction begun by the earthquake. Articles of clothing, straw hats, logs, shingles from roof tops, sections of trees, pictures, whisky casks and leather bags, all ruined or scorched by water and fire, floated past them in an endless panorama. After a while a trunk hove in view and expectancy ran high. But they were soon undeceived. It was unlocked and empty, and bore no resemblance whatever to the chest that had been described to Paul.

"Mr. Singleton," said Paul, after a while, "this seems like a foolish quest. The chances

are all against us. That box must be heavy and would sink."

The mate shook his head in a positive fashion.

"Why not?" persisted the boy.

"It's thick wood," said the mate, doggedly, "and consequently it would float."

"That don't follow," was the stubborn response; "anything heavier than the wood would naturally sink it."

"Wrong again," asserted the mate. "Why, do you know that up at Kingston they found a body in a coffin floating in the water?"

Paul shuddered.

"I have no more to say."

The mate chewed his cud with satisfaction. He had the sea-faring man's love of besting another in an argument. Jonah pulled steadily at the oars. The work was hard. Presently the guide was in such a perspiration that Paul voluntarily took his place. More than an hour had gone by and still they had found no trace of the object that brought them so many miles from home. Shortly before noon they rested on their oars and ate part of the lunch which the guide's thoughtfulness had provided. Disappointment did not affect their appetites. Job Singleton did especial justice to the light repast, saying he was as hungry as a bear, and as thirsty as a

camel. For the next three hours they covered every square yard of the waters in and about Spanishtown. Such a display of patience had never been witnessed in that locality before, and the result was always the same. Sometimes a soap box or a dry-goods box was overtaken, and once they ran into a sewing-machine and a Saratoga trunk, but never *the* chest. Very reluctantly the bow of the boat was turned in the direction of the city.

"Paul," said Singleton, "don't let us give up without another search. Let's make a final effort."

"How?"

"By going in close to the shore and then hugging about the mainland. The tide's just about turning, and a lot of rubbish is being swept in toward the shore. We've everything to gain. All we stand to lose is some more time."

"I'm with you," cried the boy, who was at the oars. "You act as pilot, and I'll pull toward the place you want to go."

They moved slowly to give the tide a chance to do its part. In a little while, they reached the muddy bars which blocked the stream below Spanishtown. It was not pleasant work, but it was necessary. Once the boat grounded, and Jonah and Singleton were obliged to get out and push it into navigable

water again. Presently Paul gave an exclamation of delight.

"What is it?" asked Singleton.

The boy lifted an oar and pointed to a small piece of wood floating in the water.

"There," he cried, "don't you see that?"

"I see a bit of wood," was the stolid response.

"But it's been a sign."

"Well? What of that?"

"Read it; read what it says."

Singleton put out a boat hook and pulled in the little board. The paint was pretty well washed off it, but he could read the words: "Packages checked here."

"Well," he said, after he had laboriously deciphered this, "what do you make out of this innocent sign?"

"Simply that we're warm, as the children used to say at home. This sign undoubtedly came from the office of the International Express Company. That being the case, some other stuff from that office must be pretty close by."

"By Jove, you're right!" exclaimed Singleton.

"Of course I'm right," smiled Paul, "but that don't mean that we're going to find the chest. It proves that we're on the right track, though."

They paddled about very slowly after that, examining every nook and corner of the mainland with microscopic eagerness. Once the boat struck the trunk of a great tree and upset the three of them into the water. While they were still laughing over this misadventure, Paul gave a chuckle of suppressed delight. The other two glanced at the boy and found him looking straight ahead at a noisome marsh. Their glances flashed there together, and three pairs of eyes beheld a square cedar chest almost buried in the mud and partly covered by weeds. Eagerly, and with trembling hands, they pulled the boat until it was beside the box. It required the united efforts of the two men and the boy to get the chest into the boat. They sat it on the two seats in the center of the craft. It weighted the boat down until the gunwales almost touched the water's edge. They gazed at the object with a rapture that was almost idolatrous. None spoke. The tension was too great for speech. Singleton was so much excited that he swallowed his cud of tobacco, and in the work of patting him on the back and giving him water to prevent him from choking to death, the others found their voices.

"Glory hallelujah!" cried Jonah.

"I'm awful glad," said Paul weakly.

When the mate recovered the use of his vo-

cal organs, he behaved like an irresponsible boy. He examined the box as if it were a stick of dynamite, touching it with the tips of his fingers, and paying it a reverence entirely out of keeping with its worldly contents. Presently something on the top of the chest attracted his attention. He reached down in the water, and grabbing a handful of seaweed, used it as a rag to clean the box. When the slime and dirt had been removed, they noticed that a series of letters were stenciled on the lid of the chest. Paul was the one to read them aloud to his companions. They said simply: "James Hawkins, Lewes, Delaware, U. S. A."

"Mr. Singleton," said Paul, "it seems a miracle that that heavy chest did not go to the bottom of the bay."

"Well," said the sailor, scratching his head sagely, "it was and it wasn't. To begin with, the wood in that chest must be five or six inches deep. Enough to float a battleship, some folks would say, although I don't say it. Again, it's evident from the bits of plaster, and the laths and the rubbish, that the chest got tangled up with a portion of the roof of the express office and floated out into the bay in that way. When the turn in the tide came, it was cast up in that pile of lumber and seaweed."

"You're a regular mystery solver," said Paul admiringly.

"No," replied the other with a shrug of the shoulders, "only a plain sailor with a little hoss sense."

At any rate, the evidence of the identity of the box was complete. The chest for whose recovery they had expended so much time and money and effort was at last actually in their possession. It seemed too good to be true, but it was true, because there it lay between them, and if they had any lingering doubts they could be dissipated by leaning over and touching the precious thing with their hands. Paul Parker's bright, youthful face glowed with joy. Job Singleton wore the expression of great satisfaction which comes to the matured mind. Jonah enjoyed a trance-like delight.

"What are you thinking of, Jonah?" asked Paul finally.

"Oh, something personal, boss," he grinned.

"Well, what was it?" insisted Paul.

"Nothing, except I thought how nice it would be if Alphonse and Gaston were only here now."

Peals of laughter threatened to end the story of the treasure chest. They were out of the mud and in deep water now, and the exuberance caused by Jonah's remark rocked the boat until there was danger of its capsizing. After

it had been steadied somewhat, Singleton turned to Paul.

"My boy, you're the Captain of this expedition and it's up to you to say what we shall do."

"I think we'd better get to shore first."

"Right! And after that, what?"

"After that, take the first steamer back to the United States again."

"Right again; now, Jonah, if you'll let me have a turn at those oars we'll get to shore in a jiffy."

As Singleton moved to take the seat occupied by Jonah, he noticed a boat coming out from the shore. He paused with an oar in each hand."

"I wonder who that is?" he said musingly. Paul shaded his eyes with his hands.

"There are three men in the boat," he said.

"Where are they going?"

"They are coming for us."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, the man in the stern pointed in this direction, and the two fellows with the oars are coming straight for our boat."

"I wonder," said Singleton, still holding the oars idly in his hands, "whether we could have been seen from the shore when we pulled the chest in?"

"Surely," replied Paul, "especially from the hotel on the hill."

"Is the boat coming?"

"Yes, rapidly."

"Can you see who is in it?"

Paul was silent for awhile. He kept his eyes glued on the outcoming boat. Presently he gave a shout—half anger and half annoyance.

"What is it?" asked Singleton.

"It's Bill Rambo; he's in the bow of the boat."

"Is that all?"

"Two chaps are with him."

"It looks like trouble," said the mate.

Paul shut his teeth grimly.

"I suppose that means a fight; a fight to a finish."

Singleton shook his head.

"We can't afford to fight now."

"Why not?"

"Because the chances are ninety-nine to a hundred that you'd lose the treasure—either to Rambo or the bottom of the bay."

"Right you are, but what remains?"

"Flight!"

"What? Flight out to sea?"

"Not much."

"What then?"

"We must skirt the island and make for Kingston. That's a crowded city. I'm willing to take my chances with Rambo there."

"It's an all-night job," muttered Paul, "but we've got to do it."

And the rowboat, freighted down with its valuable cargo, made for the deeper water of the channel, with Bill Rambo and his murderous crew in hot pursuit.

CHAPTER XXIII

PAUL AND JOB, GOING OUT TO SEA, COME
WITHIN HAILING DISTANCE OF DAVY JONES'
LOCKER

IT was an unequal race. Paul and Job alternately relieved Jonah at the oars, but even with that the pursuers were slowly but surely gaining. It was almost dusk when the contest began, and in a very little while a heavy mist came over the waters, but the outline of the other boat, with the two rowers bending steadily over the oars, could be seen. The sea was choppy, and the tide still coming in, and that made the task all the more difficult, but Paul and his companions never lost heart for an instant. Indeed, there were times when they were tempted to stop and fight it out with their rascally opponents, but always the thought of the treasure impelled them forward. After awhile the heavy voice of Bill Rambo came booming across the waters like a fog horn:

“Halt, or I’ll shoot!”

Singleton, who knew that the winds and the

waves were both opposed to pistol practice, answered cheerily:

"Shoot and be hanged."

Rambo pulled the trigger of his revolver, but all to no avail. The shot fell short of the target by many yards, and dropped, hissing, into the salt water. It was a warning, though, that was not without its effect. Job turned to Paul and said gravely:

"I've been watching those fellows. Every five minutes they gain on us by two or three boat lengths. If this keeps on, it will only be a question of time before we're captured."

Paul, who was pulling on the oars, only nodded. The mate was silent for some moments. After that he turned to the boy again.

"Let me take a turn at the oars; maybe I can make up for lost time."

Paul surrendered his seat and the giant took his place. He grasped the oars as if they were made of straw instead of heavy timber. The first pull shot the boat bounding ahead like a cork over the choppy waters. Every bit of wood in the frail craft creaked and groaned at the unwonted strain. The mate rolled up his sleeves and the veins in his arms stood out stiff and rigid. The boat appeared to yield to one who was its master. Involuntarily Paul and Jonah broke into a cheer.

Singleton paused to wipe the gathering sweat from his brow and said smilingly:

"Don't cheer so soon; we're not out of danger yet."

He leaned over and gave a fresh pull, and at that moment there came the sound of creaking wood, and his left oar broke into two parts, and the lower half went flying away on the crest of a high wave. The mate, always calm in the face of danger, went white. Paul groaned. Jonah looked on in dumb despair. Involuntarily, each one looked behind to discover the location of the enemy. All they could see was great banks of gray fog. Singleton pulled out his big silver watch and peered at its open face. He smiled in a melancholy sort of way.

"Boys," he said, "we're out of danger and in it at the same time."

"What do you mean?" asked Paul.

"I mean that it's night."

"Night?"

"Yes; after you've been in the tropics awhile, you will discover that night comes very quickly. Dusk is scarcely known here. Night has arrived and we're safe from the attacks of that murderous Rambo until morning."

"Good! Good!" cried Paul, greatly elated.

"Yes," said Singleton, "but the other part is not so good."

"The other part?"

"Yes, the other part; you probably realize that we are adrift on this great stretch of water without a rudder or a compass and with only one oar. God only knows how it will end. One thing sure, we'll float around without any purpose."

"There's no help for it?" remarked Paul interrogatively.

"No," shaking his head, "there's no help for it. All that we can do is to wait for daylight."

Paul turned to the guide with the ghost of a smile on his face.

"What are you thinking of, Jonah?"

"I don't like to tell you."

"Oh, but you must. What is it?"

"Well, boss, I'm thinking that I'm mighty hungry."

The pathos that he put into this remark made the man and the boy laugh, and that helped to relieve the strain of the situation. By a unanimous vote it was decided to eat supper. Jonah, whose foresight was becoming a by-word, had provided an old lantern. This was lighted and placed in the bottom of the boat, where the flickering glow enabled them to find the food without furnishing a sig-

nal for the enemy. Paul and Job never realized before the refreshing taste of sweet cider, or the satisfying qualities of dried beef and crackers. The top of the cedar chest served as a table, while two rusty tin cups took the place of wine glasses.

After the meal, the mate pulled out his tobacco pouch, and filling the short-stemmed pipe, took his after-dinner smoke with all of the contentment of a millionaire. He was silent during the performance, but Paul knew very well that he was considering their situation. He puffed away for ten minutes, and then emptied his pipe, knocking the ashes out on the side of the boat and cleaning the stem with a bit of straw. He tucked it away carefully, as one would a bit of valuable property. These ceremonies finished, he turned to his companions.

"Well, boys, this night will be nine hours long, and I'm going to divide the crew up into watches of three hours each."

Just then his foot splashed into a pool of water in the bottom of the boat. He turned to Jonah reprovingly.

"You ought to bail that out."

The colored man seized one of the tin cups and got to work at once. While the other two talked, he continued at his labors uninterruptedly.

Presently he looked up at Singleton.

"'Taint no use, boss."

"Why not?" sternly.

"'Cause this boat's gone and sprung a leak. As fast as I dish it out it comes in again."

A hurried examination demonstrated the truth of the assertion. The boat was leaking badly. This added new terror to their painful situation. At the mate's request the colored man kept dipping the water out. Singleton found the largest leak near the stern of the boat, and, whittling a bit of wood with his jack-knife, he caulked up the greater part of the cavity. This relieved them from immediate danger, and assured them that with constant care the craft could be kept afloat for many days. The water still oozed in the joints of the bottom of the boat, however, and it made it uncomfortable, if not dangerous. The discovery of the leak completely upset all the plans for a three-hour watch. It would not do for any of them to go to sleep on an unseaworthy boat. At least Paul thought so, but he was finally overruled by the older man, who decided that it would be perfectly safe for two of them to remain on watch while the third one slept. This made the watches longer than had originally been anticipated, but enabled each of them to get some sleep. So the night passed away—a long, dreary, lonesome night,

the memory of which remained impressed on their minds for years afterward.

Morning came at last. The darkness unfurled like a curtain that was slowly lifted to reveal the beauty of the dawn. The two men and the boy were wide awake, and they looked about them with distended eyes. A rush of delight came with the discovery that Rambo and his confederates were nowhere to be seen. Not a boat of any kind, save their own, was in sight. Indeed, as far as they could see, there was an unbroken stretch of smooth sea. Singleton, shading his eyes with his hands, looked for the shores of Spanishtown, but he could see nothing except a dim blur on the distant horizon. A painful thought flashed across his mind. He made it known to Paul.

"We've drifted out to sea!"

The boy looked up, his face filled with alarm. He tried to banish fear from his mind. His voice was cool almost to indifference.

"Well, what of that?"

Singleton laughed in a mirthless sort of fashion.

"Oh, nothing; I just thought I'd mention it."

Neither deceived the other. Both appreciated the gravity of the case. Jonah, unconscious of what was passing in the minds of his

two friends, coolly went ahead with preparations for breakfast. Biscuits, dried beef and cider were placed before them, but in very small quantities. They disposed of this quickly! and then turned to the business of the day. The business of the day? It sounded like a mockery. Their only business was to sit there drifting about idly, first in one direction and then in another; hoping, praying, that they might be picked up by some passing steamer.

The minutes and the hours melted into oblivion, and still they drifted. Singleton smoked a half dozen pipes and had very little to say. He could offer no encouragement, and he preferred to remain silent. Every now and then Job and Paul looked at the cedar chest which lay between them, and which, after all, was the cause of all their troubles. A feeling of dislike for the thing began to creep over them. This grew and grew until the inanimate chest seemed to be some horrible monster which threatened their happiness and their lives. Once a desire to hurl the chest overboard seized Paul. He cast the feeling from him as one would set aside a wicked temptation. He bathed his face in salt water, he pinched himself and sat upright—anything to be his old rational self again. Singleton realized the struggle that was going on within

the boy, and he sympathized with him. He had been adrift in an open boat before and he knew what it meant. He shuddered at the thought of what might happen. He felt that he must do something to keep their minds off their situation. He looked at his watch and turned to Jonah.

"Isn't it about time we had dinner?"

The colored man shook his head gloomily.

"Why not?" demanded Singleton, thoughtlessly.

"Cause we haven't got nothing to have dinner with."

It was a blow from an unexpected quarter. The mate felt his impotence. He reproached himself for his stupidity. He might have known that the scant supply of food would be exhausted by this time. Yet by his foolish question he had exposed their helplessness to Paul Parker. He made a pretense of laughing, but his laugh was too transparent to deceive any one.

The boat floated idly on the waves. Paul, sitting in the stern, tried to fix his mind on pleasant thoughts, but it was no use. The desperation of their situation loomed up before him like some ugly specter. His tongue was parched and his lips blistered. He was beginning to feel the agony of thirst—the most dreadful thing in human suffering. The oth-

ers were similarly afflicted. It was only at rare intervals that any of them spoke, and then it was in monosyllables. As the day came near its close the air became raw and chilly. Paul's head ached dreadfully and he wondered in a numb sort of way whether he would ever see his home again. Job Singleton was the most alert person in the party, and his glance was fixed anxiously on the bay. His eyes scanned the horizon for a vessel of some kind. He hoped for the best, but feared the worst. The situation was rapidly becoming unendurable. Hunger, thirst and cold? What next? Would it be cannibalism?

At the moment of utter hopelessness, Paul noticed a rippling of the waters. The mate lifted his eyes, and there in the distance was a rowboat rapidly drawing toward them. It needed no second glance to show that Bill Rambo and his two thieves were in the craft, and that they were still after the golden chest. The mere sight of the attacking party put new life and hope in the hearts of the shipwrecked ones. Anything was preferable to this awful inactivity. Jonah voiced the feeling of the two white men when he stood up in the boat and shook his ebony fist in the direction of the newcomers. Waving his arms in the direction

of the oncoming boat, he screamed at the top of his voice,

"Come on, you scoundrels! We're ready for you."

"Yes," muttered Paul, "we'll fight it out now as we should have fought it out in the beginning."

Singleton only smiled in a gloomy sort of way, but he, more than either of his companions, was eager and anxious for the fray. The privations they had undergone were beginning to make them light-headed. He was still able to reason out the why and wherefore of things. For instance, he realized that Rambo and his companions in their pursuit of the treasure, had, like themselves, unintentionally floated out to sea. They had oars, it was true, but they were minus rudder or compass, and probably without food or water. It was reasonable to suppose that they were weakened by the loss of these great necessities. There were three men in each boat. The odds were even. If there was any difference, it was that their own boat was overweighted by the treasure chest. The thought of the golden cargo started the mate into immediate activity.

"A rope, Jonah," he said.

The negro obeyed him in a dazed sort of way. Singleton took the rope and tied it

carefully about the chest. Then he fastened the other end of the hemp about the stern of the heavy boat.

"If anything happens to us," he said significantly, "this will keep the chest from sinking and the boat will serve as a life saver for the treasure."

"If anything happens to us," repeated Paul in melancholy tones, "I'd just as leave see the treasure go to the bottom of the sea."

"I don't agree with you," retorted the mate. "However," he added blithely, "I don't propose that anything shall happen to us."

In the meantime the boats were coming closer to one another. Rambo stood up in his craft while the two thieves rowed with a vigor worthy of a better cause. As they came within hailing distance, the red-faced one pulled out a pistol, and pointing it at Singleton, fired. The bullet whizzed over the waters with a sound resembling the swish of a silk dress, but it went foul of its mark. It went over the mate's left shoulder and sank deep in the side of the treasure chest. Rambo pulled the trigger again, but this time the boat lurched, his aim was spoiled and the hot lead went down into the cold waters.

By this time the boats were almost astern of one another. Jonah was crouching in the bow of Singleton's boat with the end of the

broken oar in his two hands. Suddenly he arose with the quickness of a shot arrow. The boats were almost side by side. Jonah raised his powerful weapon and brought it down on Rambo's arm with a terrible crash. The fellow gave a scream of agony, and moved back in his boat. The shock upset the frail craft and all three went down into the turbulent waters. Rambo was the first to reappear and he grasped the stern of the overturned boat with his two stubby hands, and held on grimly. The other two came to the surface a moment after but their heads collided with a crash and they sank for the second and last time.

In the meantime, Jonah in stepping backwards upset Singleton's boat. His party was better prepared for the catastrophe than their adversaries. It was a deep boat and it was turned bottom end up. The treasure chest went overboard, but partly floated and was held in place by the rope placed about it by Singleton's foresightedness. Paul grabbed hold of this and managed to keep his head above water. The mate and Jonah clung to the bottom of their overturned craft. They were helpless, yet in no immediate danger. Rambo, holding on to his frail support, floated in the water less than a dozen yards away from them. Each could see the other

plainly, yet all were too weak for recriminations. Singleton, the ever hopeful one, managed to murmur:

“Now if a steamer came along and picked us up, it would be all right.”

Paul smiled back at him in a ghastly sort of way. The boy wondered vaguely how long he could hold on. His fingers were becoming numb with the cold. His strength was rapidly oozing away. He tried to answer the mate and failed. A moment later the world became a blank to him. He had lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ADVENTURERS, AFTER BEING PICKED UP
BY A GOVERNMENT VESSEL, FALL IN WITH
SOME OLD FRIENDS

WHEN Paul Parker recovered consciousness, he found himself lying in a berth in a well-appointed stateroom. He was evidently aboard a craft of some distinction. His pillow and counterpane were as white as snow. Indeed, every inch of the space about him exhaled an atmosphere of wholesome cleanliness. The boy had found nothing to compare with it since the eventful morning he left his home in the United States. His first sensation was one of wonder. He had a dim recollection of hanging on the edge of eternity with numbed fingers. After that, darkness, and now, warmth and comfort. He felt like the beggar, who being hungry and homeless at night, awakes in the morning to find himself in bed in the luxurious apartments of the King.

It was daylight, and the sun was streaming through the port hole on the side of the state-

room. A flood of light came also from the skylight over the room. It served to emphasize the spotless whiteness of the painted woodwork and the flawlessness of the polished metal. Paul sat up in his berth, and found that, but for a slight stiffness, he was in good condition. He glanced about the room and noticed a circular life preserver hanging on the wall. It had stenciled on it, *U. S. R. C. Albatross*. The door opened and Job Singleton came hustling in.

"Hello, youngster; got your eyes open, have you?"

"Yes!" said Paul wonderingly. "Now will you please explain?"

"Not much to explain except that we were picked up last night. This revenue cutter has been on a special mission to San Domingo, and was starting on her return trip when one of the officers sees us bobbing up and down in the water like corks and has a boat lowered and pulls us all in."

Paul was silent and grateful. Presently he spoke eagerly.

"Do I understand that all were saved?"

"Yes, all."

"Including Rambo?"

"Yes," said the mate as if the admission did not please him, "including Rambo."

The man and the boy thought of the drown-

ing of the two thieves who were with the red-faced one, and Singleton voiced the feeling of both when he muttered:

"He has more lives than a cat."

At this juncture the door was pushed open and a woolly head inserted itself in the state-room. Paul recognized it immediately.

"Come in, Jonah!" he shouted.

Jonah came in, twirling his hat in his hands and expressing great joy at seeing "boss number two" able to sit up and take nourishment. At that remark Paul jumped out of his berth and began dressing. The mate laughed.

"You were not so spry as that last night. We thought we were going to lose you. You were senseless so long the doctor didn't know what to make of it; but he pulled you through all right, and afterward it became a case of exhaustion which merely required plenty of sleep and nourishment. You've had the sleep, now we'll try and get the nourishment."

"Was the chest saved?" interrupted Paul.

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"I don't know. We'll have to wait and see the mate. One thing sure, it can't get away from us on this boat."

Paul smiled in an absent sort of way.

"I never feel safe when Bill Rambo is about," he said.

A great noise was heard proceeding from the forecastle. Jonah noticed it and went away to ascertain the cause. He returned in a few minutes, eyes sparkling, breath coming in quick gasps. He took Paul by one hand and Job by the other. They stood still. He looked up pleadingly.

"Come with me; please come with me."

"Why?" asked the mate.

"Don't ask why. I have great news. Come."

It was impossible to resist this appeal. They followed him out of the room and on to the deck. From there they proceeded to the forecastle, and climbing down a ladder, found themselves in a dimly lighted apartment. A number of sailors were lolling about in an attitude of expectancy. Jonah marched them through to another compartment. The sound of the mooing of a cow caught their ears.

"I suppose we're going to look at the cattle," smiled Singleton.

The moment they entered the second enclosure they were greeted by an awful braying. Jonah pointed theatrically to a corner stall. There quietly munching a bundle of hay, stood Alphonse and Gaston.

Paul rushed over to them and gave each donkey a hearty hug.

"Be sure you're right, Paul," said the mate mischievously.

The boy did not reply. He was too happy for words. Besides, who could be deceived in such a case! No other donkeys could have such wonderful long ears; no other donkeys could have such shaggy hair; no other donkeys could have such mournful eyes; no other donkeys could have such an unearthly bray. They were indeed, without doubt, Alphonse and Gaston. The sailors of the *Albatross* had been having sport with the two Dominican animals. Each of them was arrayed in a sun-bonnet and an apron, and they were engaged in munching hay off two big tin plates on a heavy oaken table.

Mr. Wadsworth, the mate of the *Albatross*, entered the forecastle in time to see Paul Parker with his hands about the donkeys' necks.

"Old friends?" he asked inquiringly.

"We are," responded Paul, and he told the story of how they had purchased the donkeys in San Domingo and how they had become attached to them.

The mate listened intently, and at the conclusion of Paul's recital he said:

"Our men found the donkeys wandering about the woods just before we left Monte Cristo. I don't believe they were stolen.

It's my belief that they wandered out of the stable in San Domingo and then deliberately retraced their way back to their former home at the other end of the island."

Paul was willing to accept this theory. He said so, and added:

"Now, Mr. Wadsworth, you'd do us a very great favor if you'd let us buy those donkeys to take home with us."

"Buy them, not much," was the indignant response.

"You won't part with them, then?" asked the boy, with a sinking heart.

"We'll part with 'em all right," replied the mate, "but not for money. You bought them once and paid for them. They belong to you. You can have 'em as a gift."

He turned to the sailors.

"At least that's my view. It's up to the boys to say, though. What do you say? Does he get his donkeys?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" cried the seamen in hearty chorus, and to show their further good will, they gave three cheers for Paul and three cheers more for Alphonse and Gaston.

From the fore-castle they proceeded to the quarter-deck, which like every other part of the vessel was as spick and span as a new pin.

"Mr. Wadsworth," said Singleton to the

officer, "I have just learned that Paul and I are using your room. I want to thank you most heartily for your hospitality and to say we are prepared to bunk with the men as soon as you can find us a place."

"You won't do anything of the kind," responded the big-hearted sailor. "You were in distress and we took you in. You're my guests until we reach port."

Singleton thanked him and asked him to which port they were bound.

"Wilmington," was the reply.

Paul brightened at this information.

"That's close to our home," he said. "Our rescue by your ship seems providential."

"I don't doubt," said the mate dryly, "that any rescue from drowning is providential."

"Where did you put Rambo?" asked Singleton abruptly.

"Oh, the red-faced fellow—he's in the second mate's room. By the by, he don't seem as grateful as you two. He hasn't a very lovable disposition."

Paul and Job had the same thought. Singleton was the one to express it.

"Mr. Wadsworth," he said, "we had a cedar chest. I believe it was saved. I wasn't in a very good condition for observing anything when you pulled me aboard, but I have a hazy notion that you got the box."

"Oh, yes," was the cheerful response, "we got the box all right."

"Might I inquire what you did with it?"

"Sure; it's down in the storeroom. What do you want done with it?"

"We'd like to put it in our stateroom if you don't mind."

"Not at all. Here there, Joe," he called to a passing seaman, "you and Pete go down and get that cedar chest in the storeroom. Bring it up here."

They obeyed with alacrity, and five minutes later the precious box was on the deck in front of them. It looked weather-beaten, but the stenciled name was still there and the chest was intact.

"I might have had it put in your room right away," said the mate apologetically, "but I was waiting to see the Captain—"

"What Captain?" interrupted the alert Singleton.

"Captain Horner, the commander of this ship," replied the other. "You see, he was sound asleep when we rescued your party. He was off duty at the time and the job was so easy that I didn't even disturb him. I told him all about it this morning though, and he's very anxious to meet you."

At the mention of the Captain's name, Job Singleton gave a start of surprise.

"I shall be glad to meet Captain Horner at any time," he said significantly.

"In the meantime," resumed the mate, "we might as well dispose of this box. Boys," he called to the two sailors, "take this chest to Mr. Singleton's room."

"Mr. Singleton's room?" they asked in chorus.

"Yes—that is to say, to my room. It's the same thing."

The men lifted the box and started away. They had not gone more than three steps when a deep voice called out:

"Stop!"

Involuntarily they halted and laid the burden on the deck. All hands looked in the direction of the unexpected voice. It did not require a second glance to identify the man. It was Bill Rambo with flushed face and disheveled manner. He strode up to the group in an insolent, swaggering way. He pointed to the box and addressed himself to Mr. Wadsworth.

"What do those men intend to do with that chest?"

"They're taking it to Mr. Singleton's room."

Rambo burst out into a coarse laugh. After that he winked in a knowing way and said slowly, with a pause between each word:

"I don't think they will do anything of the kind."

"Why not?" asked the astonished mate.

"Because," was the calm rejoinder, "the chest belongs to me."

The effrontery of the man robbed Paul of his self-possession completely. He ran over to the mate of the *Albatross*.

"It's a lie, Mr. Wadsworth! It's a lie! The chest don't belong to him, and what's more, he's trying to steal it from me!"

"Is it yours?" asked the officer.

"No," replied Paul, "but I represent the rightful owner."

Rambo screwed up his mouth in an ugly sneer.

"I don't suppose Mr. Wadsworth is going to pay any attention to a hysterical boy."

Paul sprang toward the red-faced one, but Job Singleton held him back.

"Keep cool, my boy! Keep cool. You never gain anything by losing your head."

In the meantime the mate looked from one to another in a state of perfect perplexity. His eye finally lighted on the benign countenance of Job Singleton. He turned to him in a courteous manner.

"Have you anything to say?"

"Nothing except that the boy speaks the truth."

"There is a conspiracy to try and cheat me," was Rambo's unblushing comment.

"Do you hear that?" asked Mr. Wadsworth.

"Only too well," replied Singleton, "but I repeat that the chest belongs to this boy. If you had the time and the inclination I could tell you the whole story."

"Make him prove his claim to the property!" bawled Rambo.

"Have you any proof?" asked the mate gently.

Singleton shook his head sadly—

"Not a scrap of proof."

"I knew it! I knew it!" cried Rambo exultingly, "and now I'll tell you something more. They've no proof and I have."

"What is it?"

The impostor put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a bit of worn paper. He held it up in the air.

"Here's a letter from Captain Hawkins—a letter of authority which put me in command of the *Water Witch* and entitles me to the chest."

"That's mine," interjected Paul Parker.

The officer looked puzzled. He did not know what to do. At that moment, Captain Horner, the Commander of the vessel, came in view. He was a big, hearty, bluff sailor-

man, and before he reached the group, he called out:

“What’s all the trouble here, anyhow?”

Before any one had time to reply, he came up to the party. His eye lighted on the tall spare figure of Job Singleton. He looked at him again. He hesitated the fraction of a second and then rushed over and put his brawny arms about the modest-looking fellow.

“Job Singleton, as I’m a living man! Why, Job, old fellow, how have you been?”

“Jack! Jack Horner!” cried the other, returning the embrace.

Finally the hugging match ceased, and the Captain of the *Albatross* held his friend at arm’s length, and surveyed him with admiring eyes.

“So the *Albatross* pulled Job Singleton out of a watery grave. Well, I never thought that I’d ever be of any service to you.”

“Friends?” interrupted the mate respectfully.

“Friends?” repeated the Captain with a rising inflection on the word. “Why, we served before the mast as boys. We bunked together for years, and many a pipe load of tobacco I’ve begged from that old sea-dog.”

Bill Rambo had gradually slipped into the

background. The mate, turning to Horner, said:

"Captain, there was a little dispute here about the ownership of this chest. We were talking about it when you came up. This man," pointing to Rambo, "says it's his property, and the boy," indicating Paul, "swears it's his property. Now if you want to hear—"

"Stop!" thundered the Captain, "I want to hear no story. I only want to know one thing."

"What is it?" asked the mate.

"Singleton was pulled out of the water with both these fellows?"

"Yes, sir."

"What does he say?"

"He says it belongs to the boy."

"That settles it," shouted the Captain. "It belongs to the boy. Give it to him."

"Perhaps I'd better explain, Captain," said Singleton, smiling.

"Captain," roared the Commander, "don't you dare to Captain me. I'll not stand for it a minute. I'm plain Jack Horner to you, do you understand that? And you're good old Job Singleton, the grandest man that God ever breathed the breath of life into."

Paul and Jonah were glowing with pride.

Job blushed like a girl. The Captain put his hand on the mate's shoulder.

"If everybody in the world—with one exception—said white was white—and if Job Singleton—he being the exception—said white was black—I'd believe old Job."

Bill Rambo slunk out of sight. The two seamen picked up the treasure chest, and followed by Paul Parker and Jonah, started for Job Singleton's room. Here a difficulty confronted them. The chest was too large to go into the door of the cabin. After much deliberation it was decided to carry it into the storeroom of the boat and let it remain there until they reached Wilmington.

CHAPTER XXV

BILL RAMBO BY A LITTLE STRATEGY GETS A
LOOK INSIDE THE TREASURE CHEST

NOTHING would do Captain Horner but that Job Singleton should go to his cabin and talk over old times. And after that he must take dinner with him alone, Paul being turned over to the officers' mess and Jonah receiving his rations in the forecastle. In this way, the greater part of the day passed, and the *Albatross*, being a fast boat, rapidly made its way toward the United States. Toward evening, Paul and Jonah went to the storeroom to see if the treasure chest was all right. Every precaution was observed. The place had been left unprotected for a few hours in the morning, but later, everything had been found intact. They wondered now at their own carelessness, and resolved that the box should never again be left alone until it was safe in the home of the widow of Captain Hawkins.

The chest filled all of the available space on the storeroom floor, and in order to get in and

out, they were compelled to walk around it. But this temporary inconvenience was nothing to the joy of actually having it in their possession. Paul felt supremely happy. It seemed as though all his earthly wishes had been satisfied. He had achieved the object of his long and hazardous journey. In addition he had the friendship and the company of Job Singleton, and the service of the ever-faithful Jonah. And last but not least, Alphonse and Gaston were on the way home with him. He was thinking of all these things when the door opened and Job Singleton entered.

"Hello," cried the giant, "you boys are sticking pretty close to that chest."

"Do you blame us?" asked Paul.

"No," he said with a laugh, "I can't say that I do. See here," he added, "I think we ought to take a look at the inside of that box; what do you think?"

"I think so—decidedly so," responded Paul, "and as the representative of my aunt, I give you full permission to go ahead."

"All right," replied the mate, "we'll do it."

Something flashed through Paul's mind. He smiled whimsically.

"Maybe you will and maybe you won't."

"But why not?"

"Rambo has the key—that's all."

Singleton made a grimace.

"I had forgotten all about the key," he said.

"What shall we do?" asked Paul.

"Go to Rambo and ask him for it."

"Do you think he'll give it up?"

"I don't know. He might as well, though; he's up against a losing game."

"All right," said Paul, "I'll go and make a formal demand for the key."

The boy searched a long while before he found the red-faced one. He was not in his room. He finally located him sitting aft on top of a hatch, smoking a pipe. Rambo spied Paul coming in his direction and taking the pipe from his mouth, bowed profoundly and with mock politeness.

"Good evening!"

Paul did not dare trust himself to bandy words with the man. He felt that he must get directly to the business in hand or his mission would be a failure, so he said crisply:

"I want the key of the chest."

"You can't have the key of the chest," mimicked Rambo.

"Probably," said Paul, trying to keep his wits about him, "Captain Horner might induce you to give it up."

"Captain Horner! Captain Horner!" said the crafty one, pretending not to know the name, "where have I heard that name before?"

"He's the commander of the boat," volunteered Paul.

"What's he got to do with me?"

"Why, you're on his boat."

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed the sly one, "so this is his boat, is it? And I was foolish enough to imagine it belongs to the United States Government."

"Oh!" cried Paul, losing his temper, "you know well enough what I mean. And if Captain Horner comes here, he won't stand for any of your nonsense."

"Meaning that he will compel me to hand you the key."

"Exactly."

Rambo laughed until the tears ran down his red cheeks. Paul looked at him in amazement.

"You'll really have to excuse me," he said at length.

"Why this mirth?" asked Paul, ignoring the other's remark.

"It's so comical."

"What?"

"Why, the notion of the United States Government coming along with all of its power and majesty to take a key from the pocket of Bill Rambo and place it in the hands of little Paul Parker."

The reference to his youth made Paul flush.

Boy-like, he thought that a shameful thing. He turned to Rambo angrily.

"You'll have to give it up quicker than you think."

"Oh, no, I won't."

"Why not—how can you help yourself?"

"Wait a moment and I'll show you."

Paul stood watching while Rambo dug into his trousers pocket and pulled out the key—the object of their thoughts by day and their dreams by night. The man held it out on the palm of his hand. Paul felt an almost irresistible desire to reach over and grab it, but the distance was too great. Besides, he felt he must be diplomatic. Rambo looked at him with a leer.

"Do you see that?"

Paul nodded.

"Are you sure you see it?"

"Yes! Yes!"

"Now you don't."

As he uttered the words, Rambo tossed the key out into the water and it instantly sank. Paul did not know whether to cry or to laugh. He did neither. He walked away from the man with a white face and compressed lips, and as he finally reached the passageway leading to his stateroom, he could hear the loud mocking laugh of Bill Rambo.

Job Singleton listened to the recital of the

incident in silence. As Paul concluded he said:

"It's an ill wind that don't blow some one good."

"Why?"

"Why this relieves us. Rambo throws the key overboard, so there's no danger of his getting into the chest. We can go to our cabins now in peace and get a good night's sleep."

"I never thought of that."

"Well, I've done the thinking for you," said the mate good-naturedly. "Besides," he added, "I don't like the idea of looking into somebody else's chest—even if it does happen to be a treasure chest."

"I believe you're right, Mr. Singleton," said Paul. "I guess it's all for the best."

"Yes," repeated the sailor, "it's all for the best."

They left the storeroom, and half an hour later, Job and Paul and Jonah, in their respective berths, were sound asleep.

Bill Rambo stayed up late. After the incident with Paul the big-bodied fellow chuckled softly and said to himself:

"The kid and his pal don't give Bill Rambo credit for having any brains, but I'll fool 'em."

With that he put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a key. He looked at it fondly.

"I duped that smart boy all right. It was an inspiration. He thought sure I was throwing the real key overboard, and here I've got it all ready for business."

It was midnight when he crept in the direction of the storeroom. The door was closed, but when he tried the knob, he found, to his joy, that it was unlocked. He walked in on tiptoe and located the chest. He pushed the key in the lock. It was stiff and would not work. A dim light aided him in his thievish purpose. He tried the key in twenty different ways and at one time swore under his breath. But patience conquers mountains, and finally the lock was opened and the lid removed. He crouched near the box, eyes glistening with excitement, breath coming in quick eager pants.

A large oilskin covered the top of the contents. Rambo removed this quickly. He began to empty the chest. The first thing to hand was a green silk dress, evidently purchased by the Captain for his wife. The salt water had penetrated into the chest and the dress was ruined. He dug down again and brought up another dress, this one also unfit for use. After that came two or three suits of old clothing belonging to Captain Hawkins, and then a unique set of silver that had been presented to him by his crew. Rambo knew this

from the inscription on the largest piece in the set which spoke of "Captain Hawkins' loving kindness to his men." Beneath these things were a quantity of old underclothing. The bottom of the trunk appeared in view.

"Nothing there," he ejaculated.

"I'll keep it up though," he muttered to himself. "I may find something else."

He did keep it up and was rewarded with a package of United States bank notes to the amount of three hundred dollars. Next he struck a pile of silver. This was decidedly interesting, but when the silver pieces were counted, they reached the sum of one hundred and eighty-five dollars. He made a mental addition of the notes and the silver.

"Four hundred and eighty-five dollars!" he ejaculated in a tone of utter scorn.

He sat there for some minutes looking at the money in dumb disappointment. The stuff taken from the chest was piled all around him in beautiful confusion. While he sat there half dazed he heard a sound on the outside. He quickly piled the clothing in the chest again and turning the key locked it. The money he stuffed promiscuously in his trousers pockets. The footsteps were coming closer. He gave a last hasty glance at the storeroom. A piece of silver lay on the floor.

"I'll come back for that," he muttered; "I need a little air now."

Quickly he hurried out and made his way on deck.

"The deuce," he soliloquized. "I've been chasing these people all around the world for four hundred and eighty-five measly dollars. It proves one thing. It proves Jim Hawkins was a liar. I never did like that man. "Besides," he thought maliciously, "there'll be an awful disappointment for Singleton and the kid when they open that chest."

CHAPTER XXVI

JOB SINGLETON CHASES A THIEF IN THE NIGHT WITH STARTLING RESULTS

ABOUT one o'clock in the morning Job Singleton awoke. He felt restless and uneasy. He could sleep no longer. So with characteristic decision he arose and dressed and went out on deck.

It was a dark, murky sort of night, and the fog-horn on the *Albatross* was going constantly. Singleton, whose sense of locality was keen, imagined that they were steaming through the Windward Channel, and that on the following morning they would be skirting the coast of Cuba. After that it would only be a question of hours when they would sight the Bahamas and be off Florida and South Carolina. He was correct, and the *Albatross* in spite of the atmospheric handicap kept going unerringly ahead.

Some unaccountable feeling made him anxious about the treasure chest.

"I'll sleep in the storeroom," he said to himself. "That'll make me feel more at ease."

He proceeded there at once. The door was

unlocked but the chest was there all right, apparently undisturbed. He found a hammock suspended from the ceiling and swung himself into it with sailor-like agility. This improvised bed was directly over the chest. Singleton was still restless and ill at ease, an unusual condition for this veteran of the sea. He lay flat on his back and listened to the constant swish of the ocean as the staunch steamer made her way through the restless waters. Glancing about him his eyes lighted on the port hole looking out on the starboard side of the vessel. It was open for the sake of ventilation. A dull grayish light came from the outside. Singleton thought for an instant that a man's head had been poked in the opening and withdrawn. He looked intently again. There was nothing there. With an angry exclamation at himself for his nervous misgivings, he turned over on his side and made a determined effort to go to sleep.

Just as he had closed his eyes, he heard a gentle tapping on the doors of the storeroom. It was as if a mouse were nibbling at something and at each bite touching the metal of the keyhole. The mate remembered that while he had closed the door he had not locked it. While he was debating whether he should get up and fasten it, the door opened gently and some one entered the room.

The intruder was a man. He was short and thick-set. The fellow reached toward the chest. The mate waited no longer. He put out a long, sinewy arm and grabbed the stranger by the right leg. At this unexpected attack the intruder made a kick at Singleton. But the mate held the leg as though it were in a vise of iron. Not a word was spoken. The situation was tense. Both men prepared for a bitter battle. The mate raised himself up on one elbow in order to get out of the hammock. That movement loosened his hold on the leg and the intruder giving a jerk pulled the limb away and immediately ran from the room.

Singleton was up like a flash and in close pursuit. The two men ran through a passageway which led to the saloon of the vessel. From there the thief in the night made his way out on the starboard side of the boat. A steep ladder led to the next deck. He scaled it with the intuition and the alacrity of an ape. The mate saw the dim figure ascending the high steps and unhesitatingly he followed. In a half minute they were both on the upper deck. The fog was so dense now that it was almost impossible to see two feet ahead. Both moved slowly and cautiously. The first man walked backward as if fearful of a blow from behind. Singleton was about to speak, but the hoarse

and long-continued shrieks of the fog-horn made that impossible. Once the short, thick-set man stopped as if he had determined to fight it out, and then, changing his mind, proceeded on his way. He still walked backward, and Singleton, going steadily ahead, caught glimpses of him at irregular intervals. Presently pursuer and pursued reached the big smokestack in the center of the boat. The sides of the deck at this point were unguarded by rails. The stranger moved toward the starboard side, increasing his gait as he did so. A camp stool lay on the deck unseen. He tripped across it, and the next moment he fell into black space and struck the water with a splash.

Singleton cried out, but no one heard his voice. He ran downstairs, but the blowing of the fog-horn drowned all other sounds. More than five minutes passed before he located the officer in charge and told him what had happened. Very reluctantly that person ordered the engineer to slow down the machinery and stop the vessel. A small boat was lowered with great expedition, but in spite of all efforts the crew were unable to find any one in the water, a fact that caused one of the jackies to say irreverently that the big mate "had dreamt it." Singleton went back to the storeroom; the steamer resumed its journey, and the

foghorn continued its interminable wheezing.

Singleton got very little rest that night. When he arose in the morning he arranged that the storeroom should be kept under lock and key for the balance of the voyage. Job and Paul were invited to dine with the Captain that day and accepted with pleasure. Singleton felt it would be a diversion that might take his mind off the exciting happenings of the previous night. While they were in the midst of the meal, the mate, Mr. Wadsworth, handed the Captain a report telling about the stopping of the *Albatross* the night before. The Commander did not seem to attach any special importance to the matter, and after reading it, handed it back with a nod. Singleton forebore to tell the Captain of his experience, so the conversation ran on other lines. As they were finishing, the mate came in a second time and saluted his chief.

"What is it, Mr. Wadsworth?"

"I have to report a man missing, sir."

"Who is it?"

"The person called Bill Rambo."

"Have you made a thorough search?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go all through his room?"

"We did."

"What result?"

“The berth was not slept in last night.”

The Captain turned to his friend.

“He must have been the man who went over-board last night, Singleton.”

Job nodded. His reply was emphatic and convincing.

“I’m sure he was,” he said.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE DARK CLOUDS PROVE TO HAVE, NOT A SILVER, BUT A GOLDEN LINING

THE *Albatross* arrived at Wilmington twelve hours ahead of time, and Paul and Job immediately made ready to go to Lewes. This was no light task, for the problem of transportation included not only the famous chest, but also Jonah and his inseparable companions, Alphonse and Gaston. The first act, after an affectionate parting from Captain Horner and Mr. Wadsworth, was to send a telegram to Aunt Susan informing her that they would be at the old home before sunset. The next thing was to keep the chest in view until it was finally delivered into the hands of the rightful owner. They were in honor bound to regard it as a precious thing not to be lightly trusted in the hands of a stranger. The conductor promptly vetoed a request to have it carried in the regular passenger coach, but they finally compromised by permitting it to go in the baggage car, with the condition that Jonah was to stay by its side until they got to Lewes.

The quaint old town was reached at an early hour in the afternoon, and Paul and Job securing a conveyance, started at once for the house, leaving Jonah to follow with the two donkeys. The box was on the seat with the driver, but placed where it could be plainly seen by the two passengers. As the carriage drove up to the house, Aunt Susan came out of the doorway and waited on the porch. She evidently regarded their home-coming as an event, for she was elaborately attired for the occasion. She wore her silk dress, a garment which had heretofore figured only on state occasions. A white lace collar set the dress off to advantage, while a pair of silk mitts helped to emphasize the festive nature of the day.

Paul, jumping out of the carriage and rushing up the steps, quickly noted these details. Aunt Susan opened her arms wide and the next instant the boy was being smothered with a hearty hug and a very Niagara of kisses. Childless herself, she lavished upon Paul Parker all the wealth of a mother's love. Holding him at arm's length, she surveyed him from head to foot.

"You haven't changed much, Paul."

The boy laughed.

"Why, Aunt, I haven't been away more than a month."

"Yes, I know, Paul," she answered, "but a great many things can happen in a month."

"A great many things have happened in a month," he retorted, significantly.

"What do you mean?"

He was about to reply when he noticed Job Singleton standing on the sidewalk.

"Oh, Aunt!" he exclaimed, "before we say any more, I want you to greet Mr. Singleton."

"Oh, pardon me!" cried the old lady impulsively. "I was so excited over seeing Paul that I must have forgotten my manners."

"Aunt," said Paul proudly, "I want you to think an awful lot of Mr. Singleton, for he has been a true friend from start to finish."

For reply the old lady put her hand into the horny palm of the big sailor. He felt very uncomfortable, and once or twice looked toward the door, as if he contemplated flight. While they talked, the famous chest was deposited on the porch. That brought them all to a realization of the fact that the last act in their little drama was at hand.

"What shall we do with this, Aunt?" said Paul, indicating the box, with an indifference which he did not feel.

"Take it in the parlor," replied Mrs. Hawkins.

Job and Paul picked up the chest and car-

ried it into the stately room, musty from lack of usage, and laid it carefully on the floor.

"Now, Paul," said Aunt Susan, "I want to hear the story of your trip—every detail of it—and after that we'll consider the chest."

Paul appealed to his sailor friend to relate the incidents of their quest, and Job Singleton did so with a rude eloquence that held the undivided attention of their lone auditor. Her feelings responded to every phase of their adventure. When he told of the rascality of Bill Rambo, her eyes flashed fire; when he related some of the privations they had undergone, the silent tears crept down her cheeks, and when he finally told of the loyalty of Jonah and the usefulness of Alphonse and Gaston, her venerable face flushed with benign pleasure.

As Singleton concluded, Paul turned to Mrs. Hawkins.

"Now, Aunt," he said, "we'll open the chest for you."

The necessary tools were secured and the chest was soon opened. The sight of the silk dresses caused Aunt Susan to weep so that she could scarcely see for the tears.

"Oh, Jim! Jim!" she murmured to herself, "your last thought was for your old sweetheart."

Reverently the dresses were laid aside and

the other clothing unpacked. Finally the bottom of the trunk was reached. Not a trace of money was in sight. Singleton was dumbfounded. The boy burst out in angry disappointment.

"You see, Aunt," he said, bitterly, "it was all an illusion, and there isn't any money after all."

"Jim Hawkins never lied," interjected Job, finding his voice.

Aunt Susan was down on her hands and knees now, delving into the trunk.

"I can scarcely believe Jim could have an illusion on such a subject as this," she said, softly.

She made a movement to arise and as she did so she leaned the whole weight of her body on the interior of the trunk. Instantly the bottom flew up, revealing a shallow sub-compartment. The unusual weight had pressed a secret spring which opened the false bottom of the trunk. Package after package of bright yellow certificates—United States gold certificates—lay before their astonished gaze.

Paul was so excited that he shook like a leaf. Job Singleton kept running his hand through his hair and exclaiming:

"Jim Hawkins never lied! Jim Hawkins never lied in his life!"

Aunt Susan was the most composed of all.

She examined the money minutely. It was in one-hundred-dollar gold certificates—five hundred in all—a fortune of fifty thousand dollars.

“We must have these put in a place of safety before nightfall,” said the prudent old lady.

“Surely,” answered Paul, “Mr. Singleton and I will take it to the bank at once and then all anxiety will be over.”

“Very well,” she said. “And now, how am I to reward my faithful friends?”

“We want no reward!” they clamored in chorus.

“Oh, but you must,” she persisted.

There was silence for a moment and then Paul spoke.

“Aunt,” he said, “if you grant me one request, it will be all I ask.”

“Surely,” she said. “What is it?”

“There is a little cottage near the water front that can be bought for two thousand dollars. It would make a grand place for Mr. Singleton to spend his remaining days.”

“It shall be his,” she replied with emphasis.

“But, madam,” began the mate.

“No insubordination,” she said. “In the absence of Captain Hawkins I am your superior; you must do as you are told.”

The big sailor stepped backward a pace or two, and there was a suspicion of moisture

about his eyes. The old lady took Paul by the hand.

“And now, my boy, what shall I do for you?”

“Do as you will,” he murmured. “Uncle placed me in your hands.”

She folded him in her arms once again. While they were in that attitude, the door opened and the shiny, smiling face of Jonah appeared.

“Oh, Aunt,” cried Paul, laughing, “I forgot one thing. I want you to adopt Jonah.”

“He’s adopted,” she answered, smilingly.

“Oh, thank you, ma’am!” cried the colored man fervently.

The following morning Job Singleton and Paul Parker attended mass at the parish church, where they offered up fervent thanksgivings for the wonderful manner in which they had been preserved while in quest of the Golden Chest. Aunt Susan shed tears of joy. Afterwards she admitted that she had never retired at night or awakened in the morning without saying a prayer for the adventurers. And her prayers were not for gold or glory, but simply that their lives might be spared, and that Paul might be returned to her—as he was—unspotted by the world and unspoiled by success.

On their return from church they found a

letter from Jamaica. It was from one of the high officials of Kingston. He wrote by request, to say that the lives of Mark Logan and Eli Dutton had been spared and that they had joined the volunteer corps which had enlisted for the burying of the dead, and the cleaning up of the devastated island. He added, on his own account, that none of those under his control were working harder in the interest of stricken humanity than the two men from the States.

While the members of the joyous circle were contemplating one another, there was a terrible braying from without. It made Jonah look serious. He turned to Aunt Susan with great solemnity.

"What will become of Alphonse and Gaston?"

She replied quite as solemnly:

"They are yours, Jonah."

"Mine—to keep?"

"Yes, yours to have and to hold forever."

Jonah was silent for a few moments, long enough to permit the idea to work through his brain, and then he ran out to the stable and lovingly twined his arms about the necks of the docile donkeys.

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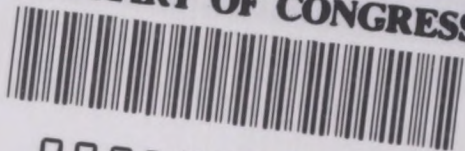
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